

HEROES, GUNPOWDER, CASSETTES & TAPE RECORDERS:  
PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION & TRANSMISSION OF HUNTERS'  
MUSICAL TRADITION IN MALI, WEST AFRICA

BY  
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A dissertation submitted to the School of History and Anthropology of the Queen's  
University of Belfast in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy  
July 2013

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*In memory of*

Leandros-Lambrakis Konkouris

1922-2003

Marianthi Konkouris

1925-2008

Sekou Camara

c.1950-2012

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Cross-cultural research can be a very costly endeavor and I am grateful for the financial support that made this work possible. As a European Union student, I had very limited access to funding: my tuition fees, conference attendance and travels were covered by a Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) Research Studentship; and field research was partly funded by the William and Betty MacQuitty Travel Scholarship. However, this was only a fraction of my overall expense. In the end, the remainder of my expenses, including living costs in Mali and Belfast, fieldwork equipment, and health expenses were funded due to the generosity of my parents and their Leandros and Marianthi Konkouris Trust. I am grateful to them for life.

At Queen's University Belfast I have benefitted from the interaction with exemplary scholars. The most obvious are my supervisor Professor Fiona Magowan, and my second supervisor Dr Marina Roseman each of whom contributed indispensable encouragement and ideas throughout this research. Their guidance and comments helped to shape this thesis, yet, any misdoings are my own fault. Professor Lisette Josephides kindly commented on one of the last drafts of the thesis and I thank her for that. I am deeply thankful to my examiners, Professor Michael D. Jackson for offering constructive criticisms and Dr Suzel Ana Reily for her suggestions and comments. This thesis benefited from both of them. I offer deep thanks to the faculty of the Department of Anthropology, especially to Professor Hastings Donnan, Dr John Knight, and Dr Maruska Svasek for commenting and discussing with me issues and aspects of Anthropology and Ethnomusicology; and finally to all the students of the department for offering criticisms and suggestions during (and after) presentations in the Postgraduate Seminar Series.

I thank Lucy Duran for introducing me to Mande music during my first trip to Mali in 2003. For me, it was the beginning of a long and fascinating journey that still has not ended. I am indebted to Karamogo Kassim Kone who helped me with my initial research proposal and preliminary research in Mali in 2007. He was my first Bamanankan language teacher along with John Hutchison. I thank them both. I also thank our hosts that made life comfortable and enjoyable, Madina Sanogo and Dr. Kulubali. In Mali, Mahamadou Konta was my way in to the Mande world. He offered his deep knowledge of the language and the field. He helped me shape my research questions and was there for me in sickness and health. I am equally indebted to the late

Sekou Camara: Ala k'a hin'a la. Apart from being my teacher, assistant and consultant, Sekou was my mentor, hunter-brother and family. This project would have been impossible without you: Karamɔɔ, ne b'i fo.

Everything I have learned about this tradition, I owe to Solo Konate. His willingness, patience and rigor to teach me the art of the nkoni, his kindness and hospitality, and all of his family, made my life easier and my research as interesting as anything can be. Karamɔɔ, I ni baara, I ni cɛ! To Lansine Kone, Adama Diakite, Namani Konate, Brulaye Sidibe, Kalifa Keita, Nfali Diakite and Bemba Konate, I owe gratitude for accepting me as a fellow apprentice and for sharing with me their experiences and dreams. To Cemogo Doumbia, Mustapha Diallo, Idrissa Doumbia Adama Doumbia, Baba Doumbia, Madu Doumbia, Ousmane Doumbia, Modibo Doumbia, Yoro Sidibe, Abdoulay Traore, Yoro Konate, Modibo Konate: For their companionship and insight in donsoya: Ai Dansɔɔ. Ai ni ko.

Ibrahim DaMonzon Diarra was the man who introduced me to the world of hunters' musicians. He was the one who presented me to Solo and it was because of his dedication and passion for this music that I pursued the investigation of hunters' radio shows. Issa Toure and Enciene Traore are the other radio presenters that I thank so much. Similarly, Siriman and Modibo Diallo provided an invaluable insight to the world of music producers. I thank them too. Adama Bagayogo helped me in my early days as an apprentice to 'get a grip on things'.

My sincere gratitude to the donsow in Wasulu: Jean Sidibe, Numuke Camara and Jatigi Kabaya Cemogo Diakite in Yanfolila; Jume Diakite, Bakari Diakite, Jedi Diakite, and Toumani Donso Diakite in Kolombalila; Mande Diakite, Mamadi Diakite and Kuru Diakite in Tijeni; Nkonifola Burama Blen, Mamadi Diakite, Morowulen Diakite and Barry Bagayogo in Kabaya; for their hospitality and enthusiasm for my research.

I am grateful to Mamadu Traore, my classificatory brother and his family with whom I stayed for the great part of my research during 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 before circumstances separated us, only geographically: Batene Doumbia, Naba Traore, Mariam Traore, Aramata Traore and Ba Traore. Your hospitality, efficacy, support in times of joy and illness are much appreciated and celebrated. Ai ni gwa! Madu, thank you for making things happen. K'an ben sooni.

Finally I would like to thank the late Eleni Sakali for being like a mother to me all these years: may God rest her soul; and my friends in Greece that took care of everything that was my business to take care, while I was away: Ioannis Klonizakis, Aris Metaxas, Christos Gousios, Christos Nikolaidis, Eleftheria Papathanasiou and Maria Kilmpasani. I am especially grateful to my partner Esmorie Miller; her support, life-stories and academic stamina made the writing process easier; and her cooking comforted the long dark hours in Belfast.

## NOTES ON LANGUAGE

I conducted my research in three different languages: Bamana<sup>1</sup>, French and English. Bamana or Bamanankan, as it is called in Mali, is the language I used in everyday life, to converse with my consultants and conduct interviews. The hunters and musicians with whom I hanged out favored Bamanankan as the ‘true’ language of donsoya. Some of them had attended school, even briefly, only to abandon the Westernized education in order to pursue apprenticeship in hunting, hunters’ music, or both. They frequently used French words and terms as it is widely common in Mali, especially Bamako. Some others, were very fluent in French because they had graduated school or moved to pursue university degrees like DaMonson Diarra, Issa Toure and Modibo Diallo. With them I conversed in both French and Bamana, but I interviewed them in Bamana only. With Sekou Camara, I spoke Bamana, French and English (and a little bit of Greek). He preferred to be interviewed in English.

While Bamana is the *lingua franca* in Mali, the official language is French and I use French spellings for place names and personal names that have been established in print to avoid confusion. Otherwise, I am following the orthography used by Direction Nationale de l’Alphabetisation Fonctionnelle et de la Linguistique Appliquee (DNAFLA). The particular sound of Bamanankan with English approximations are as follows:

<b>Bamanankan</b>	<b>English</b>
a	ah-ha
c	chair
e	day
ε	met
i	tea
ŋ	sing
ɲ	onion
o	soda
ɔ	long
r	tapped <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> By Bamanankan, my consultants meant a mixture of Bamana, Maninka and Wasulu languages known as Bamanankan, Maninkakan and Wasulunke (itself a mixture of Bamanankan, Maninkakan and Jula). Charles Bird (1982) uses the term Mandekan, to encompass the above languages among others.

<sup>2</sup> The sound is produced by tapping the tip of the tongue against the ridge area of the front of the palate.

u shoe

Pluralization of the nouns occurs with the addition of a suffix which differs according to the dialect or language: -w, -lu/-nu, and -i. For example, the word for hunter, donso, is pluralized as follows:

**Bamanankan:** donsow

**Maninkakan:** donsolu

**Wasulunke:** donsoi

In the thesis, I use the Times New Roman font for the English text, the same font but italicized for the French terms. Organizations in Mali largely have French names. I keep these names in regular (non-italicized) font. My fieldnotes are italicized, while the voices of my consultants are in double quotation marks.

In contrast, I use the Bambara Aerial font for the Bamankan text. The latter font is only available in regular form but it is the one used by the newspaper Kibaru in Mali.<sup>3</sup> Songs in Bamana are in brackets with all the words' initial letter capitalized. All the names of the harp rhythms are in lower case Bamana alphabet. I introduce Bamana terms the first time I use them but for the sake of word limit of the thesis, I do not translate or re-introduce them after that.

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<sup>3</sup> I thank Mahamadou Konta for pointing this out to me and for giving me the font to use.

## **ABSTRACT**

Theodore L. Konkouris

Heroes, Gunpowder, Cassettes & Tape Recorders: Production, Distribution &  
Transmission of Hunters' Musical Tradition in Mali, West Africa

My doctoral thesis is the culmination of years of research on Mande hunters and their music in libraries, national archives, and intensive fieldwork of 18 months among hunters in Mali. I employed the methodology of participant observation through apprenticeship, as a student of Solomane Konate, one of the most prominent hunters' musicians, a skillful hunter, knowledgeable healer, and gifted diviner, with whom I learned how to play and experience hunters' music and performance. I travelled and participated in hunters' ceremonies and public events, followed him to recording sessions and documented recording practices and events, and learned the behavioral code and worldview of the hunters.

The primary aim was to explore aspects of the contemporary commercial hunters' music scene in Bamako, based on an ethnographic account of the contexts, social organization, aesthetics and symbolism of the hunters' musical tradition in Mali. Through inquiry and discourse I explore themes of apprenticeship, hunters' performance, hunters' music, hunters' music industry, hunters' radio programmes, and finally, the growing contemporary popularity of hunters' music. I discuss the impact of the record industry and cassette recordings of hunters' music on the tradition itself, and on contemporary forms of Malian music. I show why this tradition is popular among hunters and non-hunters, and consider what it is that hunters are voicing that speaks so fully to contemporary needs and memories of Malian society.

My approach is phenomenological. Although I contextualise theoretically the field data, my interpretations are kept to a minimum, in favour of my consultants' own interpretations and explanations of their lifeworld. Including the voices of performers and their experiences as musicians and as members of the hunters' associations along with the voices and experiences of music producers and radio presenters, I explore issues of continuity and change, ideology, and style as a medium for publicly presenting and negotiating hunters' and ultimately Malian identity.

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## LIST OF CHARACTERS

Here I include the names of all the characters mentioned in the thesis. They are displayed alphabetically according to their first/given names, followed by their nick names in quotation marks and finally their surnames. I am using the French spelling that is in common use in Mali, from road signs to album artwork. I chose to do so because of the confusion a Bamanankan spelling would cause to the reader who wishes to look for further information on these musicians on the internet, books, magazines and newspapers, or hunt down new, as well as old, album releases. All the people listed here proudly asked to be included in this thesis with their real names.

**Adama Bagayogo:** one of Solo's closest friends and neighbour. A knowledgeable blacksmith by birthright and high school teacher.

**Adama Diakite:** one of Solo's apprentices and my fellow apprentice.

**Adama Doumbia:** a hunter, soma, and friend of Solo from Djikoroni in Bamako

**Baba Doumbia:** a hunter and apprentice of Cemogo Doumbia

**Bemba Konate:** Yoro's son and Solo's nephew. He played the *nege* with the ensemble of Solo. In the middle of my stay, he became an apprentice of a soma and left the family compound.

**Bintu Traore:** the youngest sister of Madu Traore.

**Brulaye Sidibe:** an old hunter and kutsuba player that is part of Solo's ensemble

**Cemogo Doumbia:** the chief of hunters in Djikoroni, Bamako. He is one of the most knowledgeable, wise and skillful hunters in Mali.

**Enciene 'Kritien Soma' Traore:** Radio presenter of hunters' show at Radio Donko and friend of Solo.

**Ibrahim 'DaMonzon' Diarra:** Radio Presenter of ORTM Chaine 2 hunters' radio show called *Donso Ka Kene*, and ORTM's Television cultural show called *Terroir*. He is probably the most well respected presenter in Mali.

**Idrissa Doumbia:** a high rank hunter from Djikoroni in Bamako

**Issa 'Dougoufana' Toure:** Radio presenter of hunters' show at Morimbabougou FM and friend of Solo. Young educated as an engineer and with a day job, Issa awaited to be initiated in the brotherhood of hunters.

**Kalifa Keita:** Solo's newest apprentice before my joining the ensemble.

**Kenja 'Tenen' Diarra:** Solo's wife.

**Lansine 'Bwa Fitini' Kone:** Solo's first student.

**Namani Konate:** Solo's youngest brother and apprentice.

**Madu Doumbia:** middle aged hunter from Djikoroni in Bamako, son of Cemogo Doumbia.

**Mamadu Gilbert 'Madu' Traore:** my classificatory brother. He is a military officer and used to be a medical student in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece. During his studies he was living with my family and during my stay in Bamako, I was living with his.

**Modibo Diallo:** son of Siriman Diallo and hunters' music producer running his own label, 'Modibo Diallo Productions'. He is also co-owner of the 'Siriman and Modibo Diallo Productions'.

**Modibo Doumbia:** young hunter and the youngest son of Cemogo Doumbia.

**Modibo Konate:** hunter and young brother of Solo Konate.

**Mustapha Diallo:** one of the most popular and well respected soma in Mali.

**Ousmane Doumbia:** young hunter from Djikoroni, son of Cemogo Doumbia.

**Sekou(ba) Camara:** high school teacher of English, musician, author, translator, interpreter, assistant and teacher of mine.

**Seydou Camara:** One of the most renowned hunters' musicians of Mali. Has worked with many American researchers on hunters' epics. He is regarded as one of the teachers of Yoro Sidibe.

**Siriman Diallo:** the first and most well known hunters' music producer running his own label 'Siriman Diallo Productions.' Since the mid-2000s, he has joined forces with his son Modibo, and renamed the label 'Siriman and Modibo Diallo Productions.'

**Solomane 'Djikoroni Solo' Konate:** master musician of hunters' music, hunter, diviner, healer, family man and my teacher.

**Yoro Konate:** Solo's oldest brother and initiated hunter

**Yoro Sidibe:** Solo's teacher and chief of all the hunters' musicians in Mali.

## **LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**

All photographs were taken by Theodore L. Konkouris unless otherwise specified. Photographs were taken with full consent of the individuals, along with permission to include them in the thesis. With large audiences this was not possible. I relied to organizers', hunters', and Solo's permission for that. Children who are depicted in photographs were keen to pose and consent was given by their parents.

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2. **Wolo** 8:59 by Kounoufa Traore. Field recording made in Segou by Theodore Konkouris in August 2007.
3. **Dokolen** 4:31 by Baala Jimba Diakite. Taken from the album *Musique des Chasseurs du Mandé* (2008) (Musée National du Mali).
4. **Ntana** 16:52 by Solomane Konate. Taken from the album *Ntana* (2010) (Modibo Diallo Productions).

### DONSONKONI RHYTHMS:

All rhythms are performed by Solo Konate. Solo introduces each rhythm, its variations and improvisations (zigzag). Recorded by Theodore Konkouris, *chez Solo* in Bamako March 2011.

5. **Sirabakelen** 2:27
6. **Siraba Modern** 3:28
7. **Marasa I** 1:02
8. **Marasa II** 3:36
9. **Ntana** 3:17
10. **Kuntigefoli I** 1:45
11. **Kuntigefoli II** 2:40
12. **Kuntigefoli III** 2:15
13. **Kuntigefoli IV** 2:00
14. **Kuntigefoli V** 1:59

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<sup>4</sup> By kind permission of the artists and producers. The original WAV audio files were retained. This sampler is for educational purposes only as part of this thesis.



15. **Jon Mansa** 1:39

16. **Janjon** 2:32

17. **Nganakorodofoli** 1:55

18. **Somafoli** 3:24



# INTRODUCTION

## THEORY AND METHOD

### RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of this thesis is to explore aspects of the contemporary commercial hunters' music scene in Bamako, based on an ethnographic account of the contexts, social organization, aesthetics and symbolism of the Mande hunters' musical tradition in Mali. Through the voices of performers and their experiences as musicians and as members of the hunters' associations (*donsotɔnw*) along with the voices and experiences of music and radio producers, I explore issues of continuity and change, ideology, and style as a medium for publicly presenting and negotiating hunters' and ultimately Malian identity.<sup>5</sup> I investigate three key areas: musical experience, practice, and performance.

More specifically, I examine processes of learning and the engagement between performers, as well as between performers and audiences. I look into hunters' musical genres and instruments, as well as the structure of songs and stories. This involves further investigating melodic rhythmic patterns, and interrogating their symbolism and meaning. I contrast hunters' performances in different contexts as performed for different audiences and show the participatory aspects and community-building effects of hunters' music. My study of the contemporary hunters' music scene in Bamako also necessitates considering the commodification of Mande hunters' music through the production of recordings by hunters for hunters as part of a regional network and a local music industry. Cassettes in particular have served to decentralise and democratise both processes of production and consumption. My research thus unveils the effects of cassette technology upon the production, dissemination, stylistic development and general cultural meaning of Mande hunters' music in Mali.<sup>6</sup> By exploring and

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<sup>5</sup> Notions of continuity and change in style have been examined in relation to issues of musical aesthetics incorporating debates around authenticity and identity. See for example Adorno (2002, 2006), Appen (2007), Frith (2004), Goehr (1992), Gracyk (1996) and Scruton (1997).

<sup>6</sup> For further discussions on music, technology and technoculture, and their implications for subcultural identities, see Green (2004), Lysloff (2003) and Sutton (1996). On cassettes as commodities and intercultural exchange of goods, see Appadurai (1986), Carrier (1995) and Manuel (1993).

understanding Mande hunters' music and its changing place in Malian society, this thesis answers a critical question that concerns the national popularity of this music in terms of how it speaks to contemporary preoccupations and contested values, and the way it is transformed through its dissemination and commodification in the public sphere.

The topic of my research is very rich and invites investigation on several interesting issues. First, I investigate who hunters' musicians are; how they are recruited, trained, operate and perform in two different settings: city and bush. Appropriate power relations between master and apprentice are fundamental for their success. Relationships are always taken into account during the evaluation of a new musician by hunters. Musicians are 'made' in part by their masters, thus, the issues of apprenticeship and training become key to the thesis. Other required skills include knowledge and ability in hunting practices (*donsoya*), and the ability and desire to follow the hunters' association's code of practice and ethics truthfully. But musical performers exist in a nexus with their audiences. Who, then, are the audiences of hunters' music? How do music-making and processes of musical reception differ between hunters' performances in the bush and in the city, and between hunters' live performance contexts and their sales of cassettes or interviews and musical exposure following radio broadcasts? Who is the target group that musicians aim at, and to what extent does this group accord with the target group determined by producers?

As I will discuss in detail in this thesis, musical activities are combined with hunting techniques practised by Malian men and surrounded by magical practices; shaping the understanding of performance.<sup>7</sup> This research attends to questions of spiritual effect and religious practices that surround local music-making, public performances and recording contexts to show how the skills acquired as neophyte musicians can be translated into successful media entrepreneurs, promoting repertoires and skills which attract national attention and popular appeal. Master hunters' musicians record and release their cassettes through record labels in Bamako. These releases will be played on the national radio shows and will also be distributed around the country.

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<sup>7</sup> Such 'extramusical' practices such as magic and religion are discussed broadly in the ethnomusicology literature; see for example Nettl (1983) for a discussion of 'music and cultural context', 'music in culture' and 'music as culture', three phrases he draws from Merriam (1964) but develops for future scholars thinking about relationships between musical and cultural practices; Titon (2001) on 'music-culture' or 'musical culture'. Seeger (2004) and Wade (2004) adopt the term 'musicking' from Small (1977, 1998) to discuss such beliefs and practices in relation to music.

I specifically ask, what are the cultural meanings and values embodied in musical symbolism and song texts of hunters' music, and how are these conveyed in musical practice? In order to explore this further area of enquiry, I examine musical style, aesthetics, and instrumental techniques. I explore how the aesthetics of musical style are played out from early learning processes to seasoned performer's practices and contexts, including recording sessions. I also investigate what makes a musician a master musician and gives him recognition by both hunters and the wider public, as this gives us insight into how central cultural morals and values embedded within musical practice are successfully conveyed by those who are then considered masters.

But hunters' music is, as I mentioned earlier, not confined to the bush; it is an ever more important aspect of city and national life in Mali. To understand this phenomenon, I turn to issues raised by the contemporary scene within which hunters' musical practices and performances occur. This entails discerning what the impact of the record industry and cassette recordings of hunters' music has been, both on the tradition itself (e.g., on fixing the repertoire) and on contemporary forms of Malian music. How then are hunters, as carriers of moral values, perceived within the music industry? The musical genre has become so popular among Malian peoples that seventeen out of the nineteen radio stations in Bamako have weekly two-hour shows on hunters' music. I therefore ask, what makes this tradition so popular among hunters and non-hunters? What is it that hunters are voicing that speaks so fully to contemporary needs and memories? Furthermore, why has it had such an influence on other Malian popular music genres (Duran 1995a, 1995b, 1999, 2000)?

Finally, one also needs to address the reverse question: to what extent has the "appropriation" of hunters' styles and repertoire fed back into the hunters' tradition itself? I look into the conditions behind its historical development, reception and expansion, and investigate the key figures within it. I examine the establishment of the industry, investigating the first producers and distributors of these cassettes and the circumstances surrounding initial recordings first made for commercial purposes. My timeline of inquiry continues into the present day music industry circuit. I then explore how hunters feel about the commodification of their music. This raises issues to be addressed concerning notions of exoticism in hunters' music.

In order to explore these key issues of the thesis in more depth I will begin, in this chapter, by presenting an introduction to the hunters with whom I conducted the fieldwork and their hospitality and engagement with the project. I then discuss the three theoretical frames that informs this study, and outline my chapter summaries.

## **INTRODUCTION TO HUNTERS IN THE FIELD**

A research project of this kind required both qualitative and quantitative collection of data. It also required a number of informants as opposed to a main one. I divided the research into two different groupings: the ‘producing complex’ and the ‘consuming complex’. The ‘producing complex’ encompassed those who participated in the production and the promotion of commodities (in this case, cassettes as well as performances). These included the musicians, music producers, record label owners, studio owners, journalists, radio and television presenters and producers.

The ‘consuming complex’ included the audience: ordinary people (as opposed to hunters) from different social and ethnic groups, and hunters. Further subdivisions were made to the former based on age, sex, profession, ethnicity, social status and prestige. For the latter, I proposed a division based on ‘ethnicity’, only to extract information concerning taste over different musical styles (Bamana, Maninka, Wasulu). Due to high levels of illiteracy, I was inclined to discharge the use of written questionnaires for both groups.

I used participant observation as my main strategic method (Bernard 2002) of working in the field. My starting point was with potential informants from the first group, the ‘producing complex’. I had four candidates. First, the label owner and producer, Siriman Diallo who through his numerous releases seemed like the most important counterpart proponent of the hunters’ music ‘boom’. I met Siriman in the summer of 2007 during my fourth annual trip to Mali. It was the longest so far, lasted three months and was my first real engagement with Malian culture and society. I stayed in a family as part of a group of American researchers who were there for a Bamanankan language course under the supervision and guidance of Professor Kassim Kone. We spent most of the day learning the basics and then would make trips downtown to practise in central market streets. We also made trips to the countryside, did research at the National Archives and immersed ourselves in anything Malian.

Kassim gracefully accepted to assist me with interviews and when the opportunity appeared, we drove to Siriman's compound in south Bamako to interview him. Siriman was keen to help me with my research. I also met his youngest son, Nama, in their family shop in the Bamako market and established a relationship with him. The shop sold mostly hunters' music cassettes produced by Siriman.

Kassim also introduced me to Mahamadou Konta. Konta was a linguist at DNFLA<sup>8</sup>, acquired an MPhil in Social Anthropology (2009) on the role of the griots (jelis) in urban spaces and he taught Bamanankan at the University of Bamako. He was also co-editor of the newspaper *Kibaru*, the only public newspaper in Bamanankan. He agreed to become my teacher and assist me with interviews, transcriptions and translations in French. He had a long interest in this topic of research and during the years that I have known him, he was always very caring, supportive, and helpful in every respect. Our long discussions greatly informed my understandings of the diversity and richness of 'Malian' culture, ethical considerations in the field and culinary customs and etiquette.

Just before Kassim's departure for the States, my classificatory brother Mamadou Traore arrived from Greece to spend a month with his family in Bamako. Madu, at the time, was studying medicine at the Military Academy of Thessaloniki, through a scholarship from the Malian army. We met the previous year (2006) in Thessaloniki, when I was looking to make connections with Malians there. He was the only one I found. A young man, motivated and hard working, he quickly became my friend and brother. He moved in with my elderly mother and me to what he called "our home." It felt only natural that I later met his family in Bamako. So when Kassim left Bamako, I moved in with them in the idyllic neighbourhood of El Farako, on the foot of Kuluba hill, where the Presidential Palace still resides.

Together, we travelled to his father's homeland in Beledougou, and met his extended family at the village of Ngoma, in the outskirts of the National Park of Baoule. Many of Madu's relatives were hunters and diviners, sorcerers and healers. There I acquired my Malian name, Namakoro Traore. We also travelled to Segou, north of Bamako to meet and record Bamana hunters' musicians at the local ORTM studio. We were sent there by our new friend Ibrima DaMonzon Diarra, the presenter of a radio

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<sup>8</sup> Direction National de l'Alphabetisation Fonctionnelle et de la Linguistique Appliquee.

programme on ORTM- Chaine 2<sup>9</sup> on hunters and their music, who lives and works in Bamako. DaMonzon is the most respected radio presenter of hunters' music in Mali. He is a trained professional journalist and holds a weekly show on hunters' music on Wednesdays at 20:30 to 22:30 at the ORTM building complex in downtown Bamako. We were invited to attend his show and interview him. DaMonzon also agreed to assist me in my research becoming my second candidate.

At the end of August 2007 Madu and I returned to Greece. He had three more years to finish his degree and I had to plan my return to Mali. I intended to spend twelve months in the field learning French and Bamanankan and making connections with hunters, musicians, producers and radio presenters. Indeed, I returned in October and started my courses and activities. Unfortunately, just before Christmas, I was called back to Greece. My mother had to undergo major surgery, which she survived, only to pass away after two weeks in the hospital. I was left alone and devastated. Thankfully, Madu was there. I spent most of 2008 trying to deal with loss and the innumerable things that follow the death of a relative in Greece.

At the beginning of 2009, I regrouped, applied and secured a place at the Social Anthropology/Ethnomusicology programme at Queen's University Belfast, and decided to make another trip to Mali. I needed to reengage with my topic, the people, the culture, and life itself. At the beginning of June, I arrived in Bamako and stayed with Madu's family in the neighbourhood of Sebenikoro, on the road to Guinea. What used to be a suburb, Sebenikoro was now part of the capital and right next to the neighbourhood of Djikoroni. Madu's family had relocated there in a rented apartment with a yard. The building block, owned by a businessman and devoted Muslim, was new, with running water and electricity.

I contacted Konta and started my language courses again. I also got in touch with DaMonzon who was happy to drive me around on his *poponi* (moped). He took me to hunters' events like radio station anniversaries, as well as wedding and child-naming celebrations. He also took me to interview Fode Moussa Sidibe, a Malian scholar, author and initiated hunter with an interest in *donsoya*. I wanted to investigate the option of studying with a master musician, as his apprentice. DaMonzon, Fode Moussa and Konta were in agreement; this was imperative. My desire was perceived as noble, showed motivation and commitment, so they asked for some time to think what

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<sup>9</sup> Office de Radiodiffusion - Television du Mali. Office of Radio & Television of Mali.



would be best for me. In the meantime, DaMonzon introduced me to some of the most prominent hunters' musicians in Bamako, radio presenters and music producers. Although I had met the older son of Siriman Diallo before, now I was properly introduced to him, as a researcher and hunters' music aficionado. Modibo had just started his own label releasing cassettes of hunters' music as well as CDs and DVDs of live performances. He was thrilled with the idea of research on hunters' music industry, and of being my consultant. He became my third candidate.

All I lacked was a master musician that would accept me as his apprentice. Every Mande hunters' brotherhood is an esoteric initiation society with a certain ethos, behaviour, cosmology, worldview and practices, exclusive to initiates (Cashion 1982). As the hunters' society is mainly accessible to men, initiation into the association of the hunters is a crucial factor in having access to the full repertoire, that is to ritual songs and the music played during the association's ceremonies/festivities and even more importantly to the knowledge the hunters possess. It is almost impossible to freely talk about 'things' to non-initiates.<sup>10</sup>

One late July evening about seven weeks into my stay, while I was sitting in the yard enjoying the cool breeze and a cold drink with Madu, who had arrived in Bamako on an urgent family matter, DaMonzon appeared with news. Solo Konate, a 'rising star' and one of the most respected hunters' musicians in Mali had agreed to become my teacher. That was an unexpected but most welcome coincidence because, as it turned out, Madu's mother and younger sister had known Solo very well for years. He used to visit mother's family house and was a dear friend of Madu's sister, Bintu. The week after, DaMonzon took Madu and me to Solo's house in Djikoroni, not far from where we lived, for proper introductions. I had met him in an event to which DaMonzon had taken me a few weeks earlier. Solo said that he 'spotted me' at once and would be glad to teach me all that he knows about hunters and their music. The bond he had with Madu's family was another sign, he felt, that this relationship would be a productive one. The feeling was mutual. A couple of days later, Madu and I were taken to the compound of Cemogo Doumbia, the hunters' chief in Djikoroni, where we were then initiated, with the most favourable signs of divination. Cemogo welcomed us to the oldest and largest hunters' brotherhood the National Federation of Hunters in Mali, and

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<sup>10</sup> More on secrecy versus openness can be found in Crook (2007), Keen (1994), Nooter (2003), Peek (1994), Roberts (2004), Vansina (1973) and Weiner (2001).

gave us his blessings. Next day we followed Solo to a celebration as his apprentices and two days later we returned to Greece. I had a fourth candidate.

Reconnected, confident and excited, I flew to Belfast in mid-September to start the programme. Well prepared and with the guidance of my supervisors, I was able to submit my research proposal, get differentiated and acquire the title PhD Candidate. I spent Christmas in Thessaloniki with Madu, preparing for my departure. In my mind, I had Jackson's (1995: 163) sense of fieldwork as 'reaching a set destination' as 'undertaking a journey, of broadening one's horizons,' where 'meaning resides in the journeying, not the destination.' This idea resonated beautifully with C.P. Cavafy's words in his poem, *Ithaka*: 'When you set out on your journey to Ithaka, pray that the road is long, full of adventure, full of knowledge.'<sup>11</sup> Ithaka, the final destination for every person's quest for life, wealth, knowledge and wisdom, is also the end of the story.

In stories, Jackson (2002: 30) writes, 'the energy that motivates the journeys and quests that articulate movements to and fro between contrasted fields of being, arises from an existential imperative that compels human beings to transform the world as it is felt to bear upon them into a world in which they, both as individual subjects and as members of collectivities, feel they play a vital part.' Stories change our experience of how things are; they are journeys 'between such disparate realms as town/bush, heaven/earth, the land of the living/the land of the dead that one may see in journeying one of the preconditions of the possibility of narrative itself' (ibid). I was ready to live mine and to listen to more.

Finally, on 03 February 2010, I landed in Bamako. I was picked up by my friend Oumar accompanied by Madu's wife, Naba. We drove straight to the family's apartment in Sebenikoro. Batene, Madu's widowed mother was expecting me, along with two of Madu's children, Aramata and Ba, who soon went to bed as school was waiting for them the next morning. I took that day off and organised my books, clothes, video and sound recording gear. My room was large, with a desk and a chair, a small closet and a double wooden bed that I had bought, as a set, back in 2007. I had lunch with the family, as usual. Both Batene and Naba were excellent cooks, praised by many. I have enjoyed every Malian dish they prepared all these years.

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<sup>11</sup> This is my preferred translation by George Barbanis: <http://users.hol.gr/%7Ebarbanis/cavafy/>

Solo lived in the area of Djikoroni in Bamako. Twenty years ago, Djikoroni used to be at the outskirts of the capital on the way to Guinea. Today it occupies a fairly central space of the city. I had easy access to him since Sebenikoro is right next to Djikoroni and our homes were ten minutes away on foot. Normally teacher and pupils meet everyday to practise and play music. It is through this process that one learns the art of the *donsonkoni*, the hunters' harp. Everyday for the rest of my stay, I walked to Solo's place to practice with Solo. I used to go there after lunch and leave at dusk. Most of the times Solo and friends would accompany me after the lesson to an open air bar for a round of beer, before returning to Madu's house. A wonderful and patient teacher, Solo devoted hours on end to explain the harp rhythms, playing techniques, the meaning of songs and music. His widowed mother lived with him, along with three of his brothers with their wives and children. His own wife, was caring, helpful and hospitable (and always joking with me). His children, all six of them, from the teenage daughter to the baby girl, welcomed and treated me as their brother. His two boys were asking me questions about pretty much everything, the youngest girls demanding my attention and seeking a hug.

Solo's brothers, hunters and diviners themselves, contributed to my understanding of *donsoya* along with the numerous hunters that visited Solo daily. Solo's friends also visited on a daily basis along with neighbours. Two of Solo's closest friends were private radio presenters and were of great importance to this project: Issa Toure and Enciene Traore. The first, a young man with a degree in engineering was presenting a hunters' show at radio Moribabougou FM and the second, closer to the age of Solo, presented at Radio Donko. Both of them helped me shape my understanding about transmission, dissemination, promotion and reception of hunters' music in Mali; and also the relationships, dynamics, and negotiations between producers, musicians and audiences. All these people's comments, suggestions and productive criticisms shaped my music performing abilities over my stay.

Solo's apprentices were also invaluable consultants to me. They helped me understand what being a *donsonkonifola* apprentice is like and shed light on aspects of apprenticeship that were obscure, especially the ties and bonds between apprentices. I have also 'hung out' with numerous hunters, non-hunters, women, children and men of all ages and social background who helped me grasp the reasons for *donsonkoni*'s popularity and importance. I bring all these voices together in this thesis.

Because Solo was so popular amongst hunters and non-hunters alike, he got invitations from all over the country to play for hunters' gatherings and for public events. He always travelled with his students who also formed his ensemble. I participated in these events and observed human behaviour, while filming and recording performances. We travelled by car, using his Audi A4 Station wagon. When that completely broke down, we used an old Mercedes 190D. These events can occur quite often during the dry season (October to June). During the rainy season they become less frequent. In general, all the activities of the hunters are restricted during this season mainly because of the weather conditions (heavy rain, wet soil, mud etc). Having said that, Solo was busy enough the summers of 2009 and 2010 as he was on tour for a couple of weeks. When in Bamako he always had at least two events per week. Travelling by car was easy enough but travelling with hunters and/or hunters' musicians was even easier. The people and authorities respect and fear them and are always eager to help in situations of need. Furthermore, there were no permit issues for travelling across the country.

In June 2010, Solo recorded for Modibo Diallo's label in Bamako. Modibo, an educated young man who developed an interest in hunters' music through his father, Siriman, holds a MA in History. He is a respected producer with a reputation of being very effective in his work. He also runs his father's record shop in the big market, downtown Bamako. There are numerous studios where these musicians record. Some are run by Malians, others by Nigerians, Ivoireans and Guineans. I had the chance to be in the studio with both my consultants. That informed my understanding of production, but also of distribution, through my interaction with Modibo Diallo.

Unfortunately, in early July and after a cold and wet night in the countryside, where Solo was performing, I had a severe attack of pneumonia, which was diagnosed but mishandled. The blood infused phlegm I coughed for weeks, weight drop and persisting shadow on my left lung suggested that I needed to fly out of the country for a biopsy and immediate treatment. I left at the end of July, terrified, shattered and uncertain about the future. Everyone in Mali was worried but seemed optimistic. Solo's wife thought that I would never come back again. I returned to Thessaloniki and was hospitalised for a few days. The diagnosis was inconclusive and I had to wait four weeks in order to eliminate the possibility of cancer. Luckily, at the end of August,

cancer was out of the picture and I was out in the field again. Madu came with me, this time as a qualified MD.

In September, we got through many changes. Madu finally solved the issue of family accommodation by acquiring a cozy, newly built house with a yard in the town of Kati, just outside Bamako. At the end of that month they moved. I moved to another apartment within a restaurant compound run by a Senegalese woman. From then on, I lived in the ACI 2000 neighbourhood and enjoyed Senegalese and Malian cuisine. I continued going to Solo's place in the mornings and had breakfast and lunch with his family. They were all excited that I was back. With the rainy season behind us, we started performing and travelling again. Most of the evenings Solo would visit me and spent a few hours listening to music, the recordings I made, or watch the video and photos I took during performances. We would talk and reflect on them.

Unfortunately, Konta was unable to continue as my language teacher. He had been so busy with his other activities and had no time for assisting me in interviews and such. For two months, I was in despair. I then contacted a man that changed my life once more. Sekou Camara took over in November 2010. I got in touch with him with the intention to interview him but from the first moment, it was clear that our relationship would go beyond that. Sekou was an extraordinary human being. An English language teacher in two different schools in Bamako, he was also a father of eleven (his 'football team', he joked). Son of renowned hunters' bard Seydou Camara, Sekou was also an initiated hunter, 'dormant' donsonkonifola, kamalennkoni player, diviner, blacksmith and komo priest, and research assistant for many Western scholars. Sekou became my consultant in donsoya, music, divination, komo lore. He assisted me in my final interviews, transcribed and translated them and mailed the manuscripts to Belfast. Sekou became my dear friend, karamɔɔɔ, hunter-brother and family.

During fieldwork, I interviewed hunters and hunters' musicians in Bamako and the countryside, and analysed musical meanings through their discourse. These were informal discussions, never recorded but always appreciated. Solo would introduce me to people before, during and after performances and explain to them who I was and what I was doing there. This helped develop a clear understanding on their part, enabling clarity all around. Whenever there was reason for me not to take pictures or film, they would say so. It was up to them to share any experiences, thoughts, stories and elements of hunters' culture. I have also engaged with them in other themes and

discussions on politics, Malian and Greek society, government corruption, philosophy, civilisation, colonisation, imperialism, family, marriage, women, siblings, alcohol, and the list goes on. Yet, I had not recorded a semi-structured interview. In December, Sekou helped me rectify this.

During the next couple of months, I invited my main consultants to my small apartment for interviews. We conducted all interviews in Bamanankan. One at a time Solo, two of his apprentices, Modibo, DaMonzon and Issa marched in and out of the apartment. Sekou was interviewed in English as he wished. They all agreed that I should have a record of all the things we discussed over the year, ‘in one place’, a cassette (or a couple of dozen...). This way, they said, I could refer to it in need. Much of this thesis is based on these interviews.

During my stay, I kept a diary, a fieldnotes document, along with a calendar in my MacBook. My daily routine involved writing fieldnotes at home, usually at night. Sometimes I had to write them early in the morning, after a long night of performing, for example. After a weekend in the countryside for hunters’ events, Solo would take the next day off and I would sit at home working on notes, field recordings, photos and videos. I did not write any notes in front of people, preferring instead to write them when on my own. With Solo, things were different: he encouraged me to take notes during our music practice, in his house and before his performances. I used my photo and video camera to keep track of what was happening during the event. When I got back home, I would watch them and write my notes. I managed my field recordings with iTunes; pictures with iPhoto; and videos with iMovie software. I backed them up in two external hard drives: one for the videos and another for the rest. I also had my documents in a handy USB flash memory drive. My computer crashed twice in the field and I had it repaired in Bamako by a local technician. One of my external drives also crashed and I had to replace it with one bought in the local market. Luckily all data was saved and I came back with: 670,000 words in fieldnotes; 10,000 digital photos; 52 hours of interviews; 32 hours of field recordings; and 48 hours of videos of hunters’ performances.

The field recordings I made were mostly of Solo’s public performances but also three sessions we did in a mango orchard next to his house. He and his ensemble performed classic and popular hunters’ songs, hunters’ epics, and death songs. Solo and I also recorded his entire repertoire of hunters’ harp rhythms during two sessions in his

house. He performed them on his own. The public performances I filmed, were encouraged by the musicians and hunters. They would assist me in a number of ways: by clearing the site from other amateur recordists and video shooters; by suggesting shooting angles; by clearing a space among themselves from which I might shoot; and by taking my devices to shoot some footage themselves.

Towards the end of my stay at the end of March, Sekou took me for a two-week field trip to Wasulu. We visited a number of villages and talked to many hunters. We spent a week in Guinea and another one in his hometown, Kabaya, with Sekou's family there. He introduced me to the elders of Kabaya, the chief of the hunters, his father's apprentices and to many hunters. They welcomed me, talked to me and initiated me to their brotherhood. The komo priest of the region, initiated me to the komo secret society and invited me to spend a year with him as an apprentice. The hunters also invited me for some 'real hunting', they said. We returned to Bamako tired but fulfilled, and started preparations for my return to Greece.

Solo and the hunters in Djikoroni were very keen on this field trip. In fact they pushed me to go in such a way that any reservations I had vanished into thin air. I was worried about Solo's feelings. I did not want him to think that I was abandoning him, or choosing Wasulu over him. He urged me to go and when we came back, he was there waiting for me. We spent the last days together as a family in both homes. He initiated me into the art of divination and explained the basics. He noted that I would have to come back after my degree, bringing a copy of my thesis to leave with them. I also promised to bring photo albums for the brotherhood and Solo's family. Solo, Sekou and I visited everyone to say our goodbyes and organised a gathering in my apartment for an emotionally charged final party. The next day Oumar drove me to the airport. Sekou came along. We stopped at a bar for a last drink. That was the last time I saw Sekou Camara. He died in November 25, 2012.

It is unthinkable and unethical for Mande experts, scholars and researchers not to compensate their consultants in the field. Every contribution of Malian people is significant and valuable. I had excellent teachers, yet, I made mistakes. Sometimes I offered to give or take something with my left hand, or refused a small gift, or offered money when inappropriate. I learned the hard way. It is the only way. In a rich culture like this, knowledge comes slowly, painfully and permanently. The hunters enjoyed our discussions but refused to take money from me. To them, I was a hunter-brother, an

apprentice of Solo and as such, I had access to their knowledge. That came with a responsibility. Certain information should never be revealed to Westerners and Malians alike.

For Solo, I was there to do work; he tried to protect me from misdoings, potentially dangerous situations and hazards. Following master-apprentice etiquette, I offered him small gifts throughout my stay: a bag of sugar and a pack of mint tea, cola nuts, small coins, a beer or a bottle of his favourite rum. He refused any other payment as my teacher. It was only when his car broke down that he finally asked my help. Without a car, he was confined to the city centre. Many of his performances were at distant neighbourhoods of Bamako or deep in the countryside. That meant that he would not be able to provide for the family living in his compound. It would also compromise his image as a successful musician and affect his fame. I contributed so he could buy a used car. This was cheered by his family, close friends and hunters, and the chief of Djikoroni hunters. For me it meant that I had access to all these different events and contexts of musical performance.

Modibo also refused any payment from me so I decided to buy as many cassettes of hunters music I could afford during all this time. DaMonzon similarly refused money; instead I offered him my old camcorder when he expressed an interest in filming hunters' public events. Issa equally refused payment; I offered him my analog tape recorder which he needed. Solo's apprentices never asked for money, but we were always sharing cigarettes, beer and wine. At the very end they asked for £25 so they could repair Solo's double barrel rifle. I gladly complied. Konta was paid for language lessons monthly and Sekou was paid only for his transcriptions and translations. This was his will. In fact he charged me half the price of what he charged Western researchers for this job. I left all my belongings with him.

Madu's family had a hard time in Bamako. They refused to take any form of compensation from me all these years. Their excuse was the fact that Madu was under the care of my family in Greece. The least I could do, I felt, was to contribute to their wellbeing. I provided the rice for all the time I stayed with them, bringing small gifts for the kids and hot buttery croissants for Batene and Naba. I also took care of electricity bills and obtained mouthwatering roasted goat's meat from the local rotisserie every now and then. When the opportunity of a new house that would take them out of paying



rent and provide a permanent roof for them all arose, I helped Madu financially, stating that this was my mother's will.

For eighteen months, all these wonderful people became my family, and still are. They took care of me; fed me; accommodated me; protected me; informed me; and nursed me when I was sick. Apart from the nearly fatal pneumonia, I was attacked by malaria twice and by typhoid fever once. I coped with weekly colds, bug bites, and street food poisoning. I was never alone nor felt lonely. I felt a deep sense of belonging that, with my return to Greece and Belfast, turned to nostalgia and longing.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

In order to access the lifeworlds of the hunters, my main theoretical approach is phenomenological, and through this perspective I examine *musical experience* as a fundamentally intersubjective activity. I also employ two key analytical and interpretive perspectives that assist the main phenomenological approach: Practice theory as it pertains to questions of apprenticeship, hunters' moral values and community; and performance theory in terms of how it contextualises the roles and experiences of musicians, producers, audiences and studio versus live events. The intersubjective musical relationships produced within these frameworks are shown to have particular religious, political and economic outcomes.

Employing theories of phenomenology, practice, and performance, I aim to arrive at theories of knowledge based on both a phenomenology and hermeneutics of Malian understanding of hunters' musical performance. This takes into account what we might call 'live' performances in ritual contexts, as well as investigating the popularity of and music industry involvement in this genre in contemporary Bamako. In my research, I dealt with a number of different people such as master musicians and their students, hunters and local residents in different contexts (public events, hunters' ceremonies and residencies) and engaged in discussions with them in order to find out their views on the music and its meaning. I had the assistance of some very knowledgeable individuals who helped me through this experience.

## MUSICAL ETHNOGRAPHY AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

A phenomenological study of Mande musicians invites the ethnographer to analyse musical structures, genres and sounds as distinctive yet intimate according to specific Mande contexts and relationships. This approach requires that attention to the political history of Mande society and musical development is an integral aspect of this ethnomusicological inquiry as well as more broadly.

In historical concerns of Ethnomusicology, Bohlman (1991: 138) points to the 'persistent presence of cultural critique whenever one's culture is studied by someone from another'. Cultural critique is the result of the process of 'turning beyond one's familiar world to learn something about oneself by observing another' (ibid). Musical ethnographies frequently narrow the distance between musical cultures, looking for meaningful comparisons by experimenting with different modes of representation and innovation in ethnographic writing; and understanding a musical culture by internalizing the music's criteria and structure (cf. Marcus and Fisher 1986: 24-25 in Bohlman 1991: 137).

Ethnomusicology has moved from comparative musicology and studies of musical folklore in the early 1960s to the anthropology of music, the 'native point of view', or what Merriam (1964) calls a three-part feedback model of music in culture: 'Ideas, behaviour, and sound'. Ethnomusicology moved onwards, during the 1980s, to a new paradigm of 'the study of people making music' (Titon 1997:91). This fieldwork approach sees music as text that needs interpretation in a hermeneutic circle (Ricoeur 1981). Titon detaches himself from objectification and reflexivity to assert that, 'I think that musical being is a special ontology and that knowing music requires that we start from musical being' (1997: 94). Musical knowledge is grounded in the practice of music. Fieldwork then, is an experience of oneself in relation to other people and is inter-subjective and personally transformative. As Titon (1997:95) writes: 'My task now is to represent the music-culture where I have worked, not only to students and colleagues, but also to the people in that music-culture'. This approach was fundamental to my research because, in the field, I was expected to perform both as a music pupil for small audiences, and as a member of the hunters' brotherhood who follows the behavioural code of the hunters. These 'interactions and transactions of consociates – researcher and researched encountering each other face to face in the mundane and

sometimes extra-ordinary realities of everyday life' (Friedson 1996: 2) provide the basis of phenomenological and practice-based ethnographic detail.

It is also important to recognise the place of history in the ethnographic present. By extending Victor Turner's term 'liminal' (1969: 95 in Friedson 1996:186-7) to include the in-between of ethnographic encounters, Friedson positions the boundaries of social transactions in the 'liminal moment – between tradition and possibility, between the particular and the universal – when the horizontal future plays out into the historical past.' Because of this moment, fieldwork experience goes beyond an objective interrogation and becomes interpretation (ibid); it also becomes a very special type of 'history' that is ethnographically sensitive to the past, present, and future.

My key point is that Mande hunters in Mali experience the past-present dimensions of their life-worlds in an intersubjective way. Their social status is ambiguous because they are capable of doing both harm and good: they are holders of old moral values but also keepers of occult knowledge and life-threatening secret powers. They may walk the streets of the city but also dwell in the bush, the home of darkness, spirits and magic. They interact with their hunter-brothers but also with ordinary people: their families, their friends, their business associates, the bureaucratic state, political parties and government officials. The notion of intersubjectivity, thus, is absolutely critical, as Jackson suggests, in the investigation and interpretation of hunters' experience in everyday life and ritual.

As Jackson (1990: 68) writes, 'The manner in which understanding is constituted intersubjectively can be studied *ethnographically* by observing indigenous social interaction, but it can also be studied *reflexively* by focusing on the ethnographical encounter itself.' Elsewhere, Jackson (1998: 4) explains that intersubjectivity should be more than shared experience and empathic understanding; that it should 'embrace centripetal and centrifugal forces, and constructive and destructive extremes without prejudice' like compassion and conflict, identity and difference.

Jackson (1998: 7) sees the notion of intersubjectivity as useful in three ways: Firstly, it resonates with non-Western people's ideas of identity as relational, variable and 'mutually arising', instead of emphasising the isolated individual; secondly, it elucidates the way indigenous, traditional and spiritual approaches interpret the

‘extrapsychic’ (unknown) processes that the west interprets as ‘intrapsychic’ (unconscious) and thirdly, it helps western scholars analyse the relationship between the subject as an empirical person with will and consciousness, and ‘abstract generalities such as society, class, gender, nation, structure, history, culture, and tradition that are subjects of thought but not themselves possessed of life.’ Intersubjectivity, Jackson (ibid) observes, is paradoxical and ambiguous because it is ‘a site for constructive, destructive and reconstructive interaction’. Moving between positive and negative poles, human beings are both subjects to themselves and objects for others: self and other are ‘existentially dependent and beholden’ to each other. Its dyadic character is mediated by ‘a third party, a shared idea, a common goal’; it is shaped by ‘unconscious, habitual, taken-for-granted dispositions [and] by conscious intentions and worldviews; it ‘reflects the instability of human consciousness’; and may be explored ‘as a problem of knowledge’ (ibid: 8-10). Jackson’s approach prompts us to ask, can empathy, transference, or analogy help us to understand the other and to know the Other’s inner experience?

Intersubjectivity is a relational concept that can only be understood in terms of interactions between individuals and groups. The fact that Mande hunters act, enact, react and experience the world intersubjectively is evident in my discussion of hunters’ apprenticeship, ceremonies studio recordings and live performances. The close relationship between the master-teacher and his students and the sibling-like affinity between apprentices allows such shared experience (Chapter Two). Likewise, in performances during ceremonies and public events, hunters not only interact intersubjectively with each other but also with the wider public: ordinary men and women, young and old, familiar or otherwise (Chapter Four and Seven). Even in during recordings, studio or live, hunters’ musicians interact and negotiate meaning with their producers as I show in Chapter Five.

When discussing intersubjective musical experience, Schutz (1976; 1977) underlines the importance of the internal temporal flow of the musical work. Music’s inner time makes possible an experiential ‘togetherness’ especially for face-to-face encounters. As Porcello (1998) argues, rhythmic and harmonic structures establish temporal relations internally to the musical work. These relations along with the flow of the internal structure are directly related to ‘the temporal epistemologies of the social

world in which the music is performed, listened to, remembered, or otherwise experienced' (ibid: 486). Schutz (1977) discusses this relationship between composer and beholder as 'musical tuning-in' by experiencing togetherness as 'We' or 'we-ness':

The social relationship between composer and beholder as it is understood here is established exclusively by the fact that a beholder of a piece of music participates in and to a certain extent re-creates the experiences of the let us suppose, anonymous fellow man who created this work not only as an expression of his musical thoughts but with communicative intent (1977 [1951]:113).

This explains, perhaps, how Mande hunters' music audiences relate to certain hunters' musicians and their songs, and become 'fans' of these artists as I explain in my discussion of producers, radio presenters and the reception of hunters' music (Chapters Five to Seven). The communicative intent that Schutz suggests is central in hunters performances, live or recorded as I show in Chapter Three, Five, Six and Seven). The hunters' stories and praise songs provide a locus for interpretation and communication. Ethnomusicologist Thomas Porcello points out that textual meaning for Schutz is truly dialogic as 'musical experience is created in the space between the form-in-time created by the composer (the "communicative intent") and the processes of participation and experience activated in the presence of the beholder' (Porcello 1998: 493). Schutz's concept of 'we-ness' (tuning-in, co-performance, vivid presence) is about sharing,

this sharing of the other's flux of experiences in inner time, this living through a vivid present in common, constitutes ... the mutual tuning-in relationship, the experience of the 'We,' which is at the foundation of all possible communication (1977 [1951]:115).

Porcello makes a distinction between we-ness and sharedness based on the way 'moments of heightened experience' are shared:

Sharedness is used to indicate moments more tightly bound to and experienced through discourse, while we-ness suggests moments, more closely bound to the

music per se, that are emically considered to transcend discourse, leaving participants quite literally speechless (Porcello 1998: 508).

Porcello delineates discourse from the transcendence that musical engagement creates by separating speech from song. Although the sonic properties of hunters' music are capable of leaving participants 'literally speechless' (ibid), it is almost unthinkable not to consider song text in the process of communicating past experiences, cultural and moral values, and memories as I discuss in Chapters Three and Seven. These texts create the basis of the wider discourse that music helps to transcend hunters and reach wider audiences creating 'sharedness'. Schutz's notion of 'togetherness' 'we-ness' and 'shared' 'heightened experience' is evident in my discussion of learning, music ensembles and hunters events and rituals, but also in processes of dissemination and transmission of hunters' music through the mass media (Chapters Two, Four, Five, Six, and Seven).

Schutz's use of 'musical tuning-in', in which musicians share a temporal internal flow in performance, of 'togetherness' is also employed by Greg Downey (2002) in his study of Brazilian Capoeira. He shares Porcello's (1998) belief that music's ultimate significance resides in both musical texts and in social and individual processes of musical encounter. Downey's phenomenological study focuses on the structures through which experience occurs and points out that people and performers perceive music with their ears, eyes and their entire bodies: skin, muscles, sinews and flesh. Musical experience is sensed experience and Downey advocates that it is shaped by social and cultural factors. Sound, then, should not be treated as a property of a musical object separate from the listener, instead, 'we might examine the culturally specific processes of listening to understand better how "music-ness" is variously perceived in sound' (Downey 2002: 489). I share his belief that 'this phenomenological process is essential to ethnomusicology' (ibid). I provide evidence of the importance of listening or 'tuning-in' in my discussion of apprenticeship and musicianship among Mande hunters in Mali.

## **PHENOMENOLOGY AND MUSICAL EXPERIENCE**

In order to work with Malian hunters I adopt a phenomenological approach to the analysis of musical experience. Phenomenology uses three methods: first, pure description of lived experience (Husserl 1927; Merleau-Ponty 1962), second, interpretation of experience by relating it to relevant features of context (Heidegger 1962), and third, analysis of the form of a type of experience. As Heidegger (*ibid*) pointed out, we and our activities are always ‘in-the-world’, and our being is ‘being-in-the-world’. Phenomenology is opposed to the Cartesian mind-body dualism and strives for ‘the body image’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962).

Phenomenology is a philosophy of knowledge that draws attention to direct observation of phenomena. It is the study of appearances of things, of things as they appear in our experience, things as they are, and if we are to add an anthropological slant, as things as they are intersubjectively experienced and interpreted by individuals historically situated within cultures and societies. It is the study of structures of experience, conscious experiences that people live through and perform. It also assumes ‘intentionality’, the directedness of experience toward things in the world, or the property of consciousness that it is a property of or about something. Phenomenology addresses the meaning things have in peoples’ experience such as the significance of objects and tools, events, self and others, and the flow of time, as they arise and are experienced in peoples’ life-worlds. Phenomenological studies are concerned with perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and the body, and hence they give rise to studies of embodied action and social activity.

Phenomenology is part of the humanistic tradition that emphasizes the common experience of all human beings and our ability to relate to the feelings of others (Veatch 1969). The only way to understand social reality is through the meanings that people give to that reality (Schutz 1962). The researcher tries to see reality through another person’s eyes. Ethnographers attempt to produce convincing descriptions of their experience within alternative cultural worlds, rather than extracting explanations and causes (Bernard 2002). Thus, I employed a reflexive approach to my role as a pupil to master musicians such as Solomane ‘Solo’ Konate. In doing so, I followed Friedson’s (1996:2) approach to phenomenology in which he detaches himself from a naïve

subjectivism in favour of a reflexive engagement with “the things themselves” (Husserl 1960: 12, in Friedson 1996).

Downey (2002) brings forward two important concepts into the discussion of musical experience: embodiment and skill. He references Blacking (1985: 64) who argued that people must have ‘acquired certain habits of assimilating sensory experience’ for music to affect them viscerally in trance (and in general). Downey (ibid) cites Edmund Carpenter (1972: 20) who argued that ‘Any sensory experience is partly a skill and any skill can be cultivated’ and then moves on to suggest that as music occurs in proximity to bodily movement, a phenomenological study of music must consider this dimension of corporeality (otherwise understood to be skill) particularly because music is perceived and understood actively in dance:

To the uninitiated ear, the music may be sound, but it is corporeally incomprehensible, unaccompanied by the practical understanding, the bodily enmeshment, that an adept ear has attained. To the dancer's ear, music is a summons to dance. In these ways, acquiring instrumental and physical proficiency affects perceptions of music and structures how sound "sounds" (Downey 2002: 500).

The training of the Mande hunters and their musicians occurs through social interaction that ensures that cultural patterns of embodiment inform the trainee whose body becomes a socialised, acculturated body with a capacity to perform with other musicians which I refer to as intercorporeality following Downey (2002:502). The musical rhythms, tempo, and phrasing, ‘moderate the physical relation between players, [so that] the kinesthetic conditioning of the listening body is emphatically intercorporeal’ (ibid:). Largely, movements are learned through mimesis, what Marcel Mauss (1973) called ‘prestigious imitation’. Downey’s insights may help us understand what intercorporeal means in everyday Mande practice, performance and music making as I demonstrate in the chapters on apprenticeship and performance. Furthermore, this phenomenological interpretation of embodiment prefigures concerns with practice and performance theory through experience in the body and between bodies.



## PRACTICE THEORY

The second key theoretical dimension used to elaborate musical experience is that of practice theory derived from Pierre Bourdieu's key concept of *habitus* (1977). Habitus is composed of systems of dispositions that generate practices and perceptions. Systems of dispositions are shaped by past events and structures, which affect current practices and structures, and condition our very perceptions of these practices and structures (Bourdieu 1984: 170). Habitus is 'a mediating principle between individual practice and what [Bourdieu] calls "objective structures"', (Turino 1990: 400). It is created through a social, rather than individual process leading to patterns that are enduring and transferable from one context to another. Habitus is not fixed or permanent and is created and reproduced unconsciously, 'without any deliberate pursuit of coherence ... without any conscious concentration' (ibid: 170).

As Turino (1990: 400) points out, the concept of habitus helps clarify:

the homologies between forms and practices among people who share a similar relation to the objective conditions, i.e., social classes and groups, and it aids the conceptualization of coherence between musical practices and activities in other domains. More important, it points to why music is not just socially structured, but in addition, how society is partially musically structured since musical activity comprises one important public domain through which the internal dispositions are externalized.

I use the concept of habitus to frame a number of enduring and transferable aspects of Mande hunters' musical life such as social institutions of apprenticeship and hunters' associations; the bondings and fissures among and within communities promoted and assuaged by hunters' music; pervading systems of knowledge, e.g. hunters' cultural and moral values; and religious and ritual practices including divination.

In order to analyse the learning processes of apprenticeship in Mande musical ensembles, I draw upon Wynn's (1994:153) term 'technology acquisition support systems'. Ingold argues that these systems are 'constituted by the relationships between more and less experienced practitioners in hands-on contexts of activity. And it is on the

reproduction of these relationships...that the continuity of a technical tradition depends.’ He re-names Wynn’s term as *systems of apprenticeship* (Ingold 2000: 36). Using the hunters of Northern Europe as case studies, the author asserts that the neophyte hunter learns by accompanying his more experienced mentors into the forest. During these hunts, he is instructed in what to look out for to develop a ‘sophisticated perpetual awareness of the properties of his surroundings and the possibilities they afford to action’ (ibid: 37). By observing, the young apprentice is actively attending to the movements of others. By imitating, he is aligning this attention to the movement of others in order to orientate himself towards the environment.

Tim Ingold (2000: 9) perceives human beings as skilled individuals in ‘a singular locus of creative growth within a continually unfolding field of relationships and not as an entity simply composed of mind, body and culture.’ Skills thus refer to the capabilities of action and perception of the individual ‘situated in a richly structured environment’ (ibid). These are passed on from generation to generation, through training and experience. Mande hunters’ apprentices are equipped, through training, with ‘keys to meaning’, clues or ciphers which they then use to perceive the world they live in. In this sensory education, songs and stories give shape to particular perceptions of their world.

Malian musicians have a tacit understanding of the relationship between speech and musical instruments. This influences their concept of musical experience and how they conceive of performing with one another. This relationship between music, speech and the ability to play has been noted in other studies of musical experience. For example, Ingold suggests that we consider speech as an aspect of song. It follows that if to speak is to sing, then to use a tool is to play. An accomplished cellist, Ingold views his posture and the movement of his arm and, by implication, its extension, the bow, along with the fingering on the fingerboard of the cello, as natural: ‘I then immerse myself into the music, like a swimmer into water, and lose myself in the surrounding ambience of sound’ (ibid: 413). The experience is an acute awareness not of his *playing* but his *experience of playing*. The performance embodies intentionality as well as feeling: to play is to feel and by playing, one puts feeling into music.

He parallels cello playing with another activity, that of lasso throwing. The reindeer herdsman of northern Finland use it to capture selected animals. The tool is very simple in its construction but, in the moment of being cast, it comes alive. Its form

never stands still as it travels in the air. It becomes like a musical phrase, shaped in sound. The lasso throwing, just like cello playing, involves an embodied skill obtained through practice, and intention in its operationalization. Just as the cellist pays attention to the conductor, likewise the herdsman attends to the movement of the herd in the field. To act is to attend to, to be aware of a field within which one is a locus, just as to play is to feel. There is a lapse in the time between attention and response in both activities but the skilled musician or herdsman is able to adjust his movements continually without interrupting the flow of action. To attend, to be aware is equally important to Mande hunters' musicians: as young apprentices are required to pay attention to their master, to imitate the movement of his hands and fingers plucking the harp's strings during rehearsals and music teaching; the movement of his body during performances and dancing; and listen to the way he is choosing the appropriate words and ways to weave them together during singing to dazzle the audience (Chapter Two). As master musicians, they pay attention to their audiences: the hunters present in an event, which will inform their decisions on which hunters to challenge first and so on (Chapter Three, Four, Seven). They pay attention to their hunter-brothers in and out of ritual, for their accumulation of knowledge never stops and they learn from one another (Chapter Four). They pay attention to what their record producers have to say to them in order to make a recording more successful and attract more people to their following (Chapter Five).

Ingold (ibid: 415) suggests that in every branch of apprenticeship, the neophyte is asked 'to *notice* those subtleties of texture that are all-important to good judgment and the successful practice of a craft'. As I will show in Chapter Two, the development of skills from neophyte to master require that hunters judge not only the aptness of musical experience but also the attribute of appropriate moral deference. Skill then becomes moral activity. Lave (1990: 310) calls this kind of learning 'understanding in practice' and juxtaposes it to 'the culture of acquisition' or *enculturation* which implies an already accumulated body of knowledge in the form of rules and axioms. *Enculturation* presupposes an internalisation of collective representations in learning. 'Understanding in practice' further points toward a process of *enskilment*. In that, learning is inseparable from doing and both are embedded in what Ingold terms *dwelling*: the practical engagement in the world. Mande hunters' musicians acquire their musical skills similarly, by observing and imitating their teachers' techniques in singing

and playing the harp. They do not study a body of knowledge and then apply it to their craft. Rather, they become proficient through practice.

Wenger, studying apprenticeship as a learning process, used the term *legitimate peripheral learning* to characterise learning (Wenger 1998: 11). In order to broaden the traditional learning consociations from those of master/student to those of changing participation and identity transformation among more diffusely associated groups and contexts of learning, he introduced the term ‘communities of practice.’ Wenger strives for a social theory of learning that places learning in the context of people’s lived experience of participation in the world.<sup>12</sup> The main focus is on learning as social and active participation in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities. A social theory of learning must integrate meaning, practice, community and identity. It is informed vertically by theories of social structure and situated experience, horizontally by theories of practice and identity, and diagonally by theories of collectivity and subjectivity as well as theories of power and meaning in a diagonal respective axis (Wenger 1998: 14). Wenger’s thesis is that, through experience individuals negotiate meaning to understand the world they live in, which includes participation and reification. They participate through acting and connecting, interaction and mutuality, membership and ultimately living in the world. We reiterate forms and focal points into documents, monuments, instruments and projections (ibid: 63).

Practice involves repetition and is beyond consciousness, much like Bourdieu’s *habitus*, which is unconscious. Bourdieu (1977) argues that practices are generated from an underlying structure, which he calls *habitus*. Wenger differentiates himself from Bourdieu by claiming that in his model, *habitus* would be an ‘emerging property of interacting practices rather than their generative infrastructure, with an existence unto itself’ (Wenger 1998:289 note 3). In essence, practice is produced by its members through the negotiation of meaning. This is an open process that welcomes new elements, but is also a recovery process that continues to rediscover and reproduce the old in the new. As my study extends into contemporary practices and communities forged through the recording and broadcast of hunters’ music in the urbanizing Malian

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<sup>12</sup> Wenger’s perspective takes for granted the biological, neurophysiological, psychological, cultural, linguistic and historical developments, and differentiates these from previous theories such as behaviourist, cognitive, constructivist, social learning and activity theories, and socialization and organizational theories, in order to offer a still compatible but more practical social theory of learning.

nation, Wenger's concepts of intergenerational interaction are especially pertinent to the analysis of community.

Perceptions of communities as small rural societies, unified entities, tightly knit communities, invented or 'Imagined Communities' have long been contested. To Wenger (1998: 73), community is a group of people that have 'mutual engagement', a 'joint enterprise' and a 'shared repertoire'. Members of such a community engage with each other, do things together, and form social relationships with variable degrees of complexity. Members also negotiate a common goal, have mutual accountability, similar interpretations of the environment, share rhythms of life and life circles, and respond to their locality. The joint pursuit of an enterprise creates resources for negotiating meaning. In the Mande hunters' context the local hunters' music industry brings hunters, hunters' musicians and audiences together, as I show in my discussion of record producers and radio presenters along with their enterprises. Communities form a shared repertoire that reflects a history of mutual engagement and remains inherently ambiguous. In the Mande case, as we shall see, it includes stories, artefacts, styles, tools and actions, historical events, discourses, concepts, and songs.<sup>13</sup>

Thus for Mande hunters as for other musical groups around the world, '*communities of practice can be thought of as shared histories of learning*' (ibid: 86, emphasis on the original). Participation and reification act as distinct forms of memory and forgetting. Mande hunters performances and recordings become a site for storytelling that enhance memories and fashion identities to fulfil the need to recognise oneself in the past. Participants in these communities remain for life, eventually retire and pass away making room for a younger, newer generation. Likewise, new artefacts and ideas, terms and concepts, images and tools are produced and adopted. In Mande communities, the generational spread is fairly broad; it may take six to ten years to move from musical learner to hunter's musician. When newcomers join the community, there is a spread of generational discontinuities and relations shift. 'Relative newcomers become relative old-timers' (Wenger 1998: 90). In my discussion of Mande masters and student lineages of teaching, the history of the practice remains embodied in the generations as they interact. As Wenger (ibid) puts it, 'the past, the present and the

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<sup>13</sup> Wenger's notion of 'mutual engagement' echoes Jackson's (1998: 12) observation that the Kuranko of Sierra Leone practice social wisdom and cultivate co-presence by 'greeting,' 'sitting together,' 'working together,' and 'moving together.'

future live together ... Practice can be shared across generational discontinuities precisely because it already is fundamentally a social process of shared learning'. For Mande hunters, 'communities of practice' may include such educational systems as associations, brotherhoods, secret societies and initiation societies. I propose that the my use of the term advances the discussion of hunters' music ensembles, hunters' brotherhoods, and the wider communities formed around them by ordinary people who comprise their audience. These *politics* of participation further include such factors as 'influence', 'personal authority', 'nepotism', 'discrimination', 'charisma', 'trust', 'friendship', and 'ambition' (Wenger 1998: 91). Wenger's (1998: 101) theories thus illuminate the politics of apprenticeship among Mande hunters since, 'In traditional apprenticeship, the sponsorship of a master is usually required for apprentices to be able to have access to the practice. The standing of the master in the community is therefore crucial'.

### **PERFORMANCE THEORY**

The third framework I use to elaborate the relationship between experience and practice is performance theory. I draw primarily upon the work of Victor Turner, Richard Schechner and Diana Taylor as each of these scholars have perceived performances as multivocal (Turner 1986), as text (Schechner 2002), and as repertoires or archives (Taylor 2003). Here, I briefly discuss the work of these authors and link performance with ritual since I believe they help contextualise Mande hunters' performances and ceremonies theoretically and complement my phenomenological and practice theory approaches.

While Turner was not a phenomenologist, he expressed a keen interest in Dilthey's notion of 'lived experience' and expanded van Gennep's concept of the liminal to liminality as highly experiential by building on the now renowned term 'communitas', which he considers to have experiential and existential qualities. Twenty years later, Richard Schechner came to build upon Turner's view that all is performance allowing for an analysis of not only musical performances and ceremonies but everyday life events as they are practiced by the participants through action and experience. As we shall see, Taylor's expansion of how performances transfer and transmit social knowledge and identity through memory bring another dimension to the analysis of performance. I would suggest that it is, in performing and the practice of performance

that anthropologists come to understand their research participants' experiences and memories. It is this way that reflexivity becomes a necessary correlate to intersubjectivity and experience, bringing together phenomenology and performance theory.

To perform, Schechner observes, can be understood in relation to the existential 'being' and its activities, or 'doing'. In that respect, 'performing' would be 'showing doing' and 'explaining "showing doing"' would be the study of 'performance', 'a reflexive effort to comprehend the world of performance and the world as performance' (2002: 22). Schechner follows Carlson (Carlson 1996: 4-5 in Schechner 2002: 25) in his definition of performance: 'the recognition that our lives are structured according to repeated and sanctioned modes of behaviour raises the possibility that all human activity could potentially be considered as "performance"' (ibid), which I also find useful, especially when analysing Mande hunters sacred ceremonies as part of larger public festivities, where participants include ordinary people as well as hunters; and I concur with Schechner's eight kinds of performances: in *everyday life*, in the *arts*, in *sports* and *entertainment*, in *business*, in *technology*, in *sex*, in *ritual* (sacred and secular) and in *play*. I acknowledge the limitations of these theoretical categories but find them useful operative distinctions for my analysis of Mande hunters' performance especially in events that include both a sacred and a secular component, such as the *kabani* ritual discussed in Chapter Four.

Schechner writes that 'Something "is" a performance when historical and social context, convention, usage and tradition say it is [and that] every action is performance' (Schechner 2002: 30). He follows Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's notion of performance (i.e. that to perform is to do, to behave and to show), and takes it further to suggest that 'any behaviour, event, action, or thing can be studied "as" performance, can be analysed in terms of doing, behaving and showing' (ibid: 32). In discussing the functions of performance, Schechner draws upon Bharata Muni, Horace and Bertolt Brecht to outline its seven principal functions: to entertain; to create beauty; to mark or change identity; to make or foster community; to heal; to teach; persuade or convince and to deal with the sacred and/or the demonic. No performance accomplishes all these functions, but many emphasise more than one (ibid: 38). In the Mande hunters' context, musical performances can be entertainment events for the general public where community is fostered; or in some contexts, sacred rituals are made accessible to

initiated hunters but they are only meant to deal with the the sacred, the supernatural or the things-to-come; while in other contexts they are performed to teach apprentices how to behave in front audiences.

Diana Taylor (2003: xvi) argues that we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, cultural agency and by making choices. She also points out that performances are essential in transferring and transmitting social knowledge, memory and identity: ‘Embodied performances have always played a central role in conserving memory and consolidating identities in literate, semiliterate, and digital societies’ (ibid). Embodied practice, like other cultural practices, offers a way of knowing. According to Taylor, performances reflect cultural and historical specificity both in their enactment and reception.

To support this, Taylor distinguishes between the written and spoken word in an interesting way, noting that the argument should be between ‘the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)’ (ibid: 19). In addition, archival memory separates the source of knowledge from the owner. The value, relevance and meaning of the archive changes over time and is open to new, different interpretations and even embodiments. I consider Mande hunters’ cassettes as part of Taylor’s notion of archive. Older songs and stories can be re-recorded and re-interpreted, shifting and changing hunters’ musical repertoire. On the other hand, the repertoire enacts embodied memory, all those acts that are perceived to hold non-reproducible knowledge. It requires *presence*: participants to produce, reproduce, regenerate and transmit knowledge. Like the archive, the repertoire is mediated. Embodied and performed acts generate, record and transmit knowledge, ‘They reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next’ (ibid: 21).<sup>14</sup>

Turner in his book *The Anthropology of Performance* (1987: 75) differentiates his approach to ritual from Schechner’s and Goffman’s use of the term ‘ritual’ and its definitions. While the latter seem to understand ritual as standardized unit act, secular or sacred, Turner means the performance of a complex sequence of symbolic acts.

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<sup>14</sup> Many ethnomusicologists of Africa, Middle East, South East Asia and Latin America, have written about archives and archival materials (Brinkhurst 2012; Fargion 2012; Hilder 2012; Johnson 2012; Kahunde 2012; Landau 2012; Lobley 2012; Niles 2012; and Seeger 1986, 1996), in relation to repatriation, revival and transmission or dissemination.



Elsewhere, Turner (1972: 1100) defines ritual as ‘a stereotyped sequence of activities performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors’ goals and interests’. While for Goffman, ‘all the world’s a stage’, full of ritual acts, for Turner (1987: 76) ‘the dramaturgical phase begins when crises arise in the daily flow of social interaction. Thus, if daily living is a kind of theatre, social drama is a kind of metatheatre, that is, a dramaturgical language about the language of ordinary role-playing and status-maintenance which constitutes communication in the quotidian social process’. Mande hunters’ everyday experiences in the bush inform their musical ethos and soundscape, as well as their heightened awareness of and manipulation of the energy force called *ɲama* as I explain and discuss in Chapters One, Three and Four. A characteristic example of everyday practice that becomes particularly symbolic in ritual is the firing of hunters’ muskets during performance.

In his book *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors* (1974: 37-41) Turner defines social dramas as units of harmonic or disharmonic social process, arising in conflict situations. Social dramas have four main phases of public action: (1) Breach of regular norm-governed social relations; (2) Crisis and widening of the breach; (3) Redressive action to resolve the crisis, and the performance of public ritual; (4) Reintegration of the disturbed social group, or of the social recognition and legitimation of irreparable schism between the contesting parties. As I shall show in Chapter Three Mande hunters’ learning processes start with a rite of passage following the voluntarily decision of a young man to become a hunter and musician. The Turnerian crisis that comes after involves the initiation ceremony followed by the long training of the neophyte before his reintegration and social recognition as a complete and skilled hunters’ musician at the time of his release from his master-teacher.

Performance, whether as speech behaviour, the presentation of self in everyday life, stage drama or social drama, becomes central in observation and hermeneutical attention (Turner 1987: 77). Social life and the presentation of self is performance. An actor (Turner calls him ‘*homo performans*’ [ibid: 81]) becomes reflexive during performance and comes to know himself better through acting. This is true for Mande hunters and their musicians as they are expected to behave and interact with their brother-hunters in a way truthful to the worldview and moral code of hunters, but also

in their interaction to the ordinary members of the wider community. Especially in hunters performances, where hunters play and dance to the music, such reflexivity becomes an inspiration to wider audiences. For Turner (ibid) a group of people may achieve the same through observation and/or participation in performances generated and presented by another group of people, as I suggest in Chapter Seven: Malians relate and draw inspiration from hunters' stories in public events and radio shows (Chapters Four, Six and Seven. Furthermore, as Turner observes: 'Self is presented through the performance of roles, through performance that breaks roles, and through declaring to a given public that one has undergone a transformation of state and status, been saved or damned, elevated or released' (ibid). The graduate hunters' musician performs as a stand alone master from the day of his release, as I show in Chapter Three.

Turner is interested in what Wilhelm Dilthey calls 'lived experience'. He writes:

For Dilthey experience is a many faceted yet coherent system dependent on the interaction and interpenetration of cognition, affect, and volition. It is made up of not only our observations and reactions, but also the cumulative wisdom (not knowledge, which is cognitive in essence) of humankind, expressed not only in custom and tradition but also in great works of art. There is a living and growing body of experience, a tradition of *communitas*, so to speak, which embodies the response of our whole collective mind to our entire collective experience. We acquire this wisdom not by abstract solitary thought, but by participation immediately or vicariously through the performance genres in sociocultural dramas (Turner 1987: 84).

This firmly informs hunters' apprenticeship and the training that neophytes undergo in and out of their master's musical ensemble and hunting practices. By playing, singing, practicing and experiencing the various aspects of musicking.

Central to Turner's discussion of sociocultural dramas and performance are the notions of liminality and *communitas*. He borrowed the term 'liminal' from Arnold van Gennep (1909) who used it to call the 'liminal phase' of *rites de passage*. Van Gennep defined *rites de passage* as 'rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age' (ibid). All rites of passage are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*, meaning 'threshold' in Latin), and aggregation. Separation consists of

symbolic behavior denoting the detachment of the individual or group either from the social structure, or from a set of cultural conditions, or from both. During the 'liminal' period, the characteristics of the ritual subject are ambiguous. In the reaggregation or reincorporation phase, the passage is completed (Turner 1969: 94). Throughout the process, the ritual subject behaviour should be 'in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions' (ibid).

Hunters' apprentices are 'liminal *personae*' (Turner 1969: 95) and their behaviour is often how Turner suggests, as I demonstrate in my discussion of hunters' learning processes. Liminal *personae* or 'threshold' people are necessarily ambiguous. They are neither here nor there; they are 'betwixt and between' (ibid: 107) the positions assigned and arranged by judicial and/or cultural conventions, and ceremonials. This ambiguity is expressed by a plethora of symbols in societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. As Turner points out, liminality is frequently compared to death, being in the womb, invisibility, darkness, wilderness, bisexuality and to the sun or moon eclipse (ibid: 95). Liminal entities, like hunters' apprentices, normally behave in a passive or humble way; obey their instructors implicitly; and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. Within this framework of submissiveness and silence, neophytes tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism among themselves while secular distinctions of rank and status vanish or are homogenized (ibid). When initiations require a long period of seclusion, such as circumcision rites or induction into secret societies, like hunters' brotherhoods, there is often a growth of liminal symbols (ibid: 96). Turner perceives the neophyte as 'a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status' (ibid: 103). I explore Turner's idea in my discussion of hunters' apprenticeship in Chapter Three to show how neophytes are trained through practice, performance and experience.

In rites, we are faced with a 'moment in and out of time', and in and out of secular social structure, which uncovers, some symbolic or verbal recognition of a 'generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties' (ibid: 96). Such ties are informed by caste, class, or rank hierarchies or of segmentary oppositions. Two major 'models' for human interrelatedness, juxtapose and alternate: (1) society as a structured,

differentiated, and hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions, and (2) society during the liminal period, ‘an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders’ (ibid: xx). Turner prefers the ‘Latin term ‘*communitas*’ to ‘community’, to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an ‘area of common living’ (ibid).

I use the term *communitas* when I discuss the formation of community in hunters’ performances, both live and transmitted through the radio. In public events hunters perform for wider audiences which actively participate by showing appreciation, awe, and involvement by applauding and dancing to the music. Malian audiences, I suggest, are in a liminal state because of contemporary developments in modern, post-colonial society, governed by rules of the new global economy and order. They are exposed in a heroic past and face an uncertain future. Thus, as I show in Chapters Six and Seven, hunters’ music brings ordinary people ‘together’ offering a shared experience of epic stories and deeply rooted music, facilitating in the creation of *communitas*. Turner believed that every person’s life experience consists of alternating exposure to structure and *communitas*, and to states and transitions. In this way, liminal entities represent the structured politico-legal hierarchy and the total community, the unstructured *communitas*. This dialectical process involves ‘successive experience of high and low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality’ (ibid: 97).

For Turner *communitas* has an existential quality and how the whole man relates to other whole men. It is

a set of classifications, a model for thinking about culture and nature and ordering one's public life. *Communitas* has also an aspect of potentiality; it is often in the subjunctive mood. Relations between total beings are generative of symbols and metaphors and comparisons; art and religion are their products rather than legal and political structures ... [*communitas*] is it the product of peculiarly human faculties, which include rationality, volition, and memory, and which develop with experience of life in society (ibid: 127-8).

Turner's term resonates with Schutz's 'we-ness', 'togetherness' and Jackson's 'doing things together'. It also resonates with Wenger's model of 'communities of practice' where members engage with each other through a shared repertoire and negotiate meaning.

## **ETHICS**

Before fleeing to the field, and before submitting this thesis, I read and understood the principles and procedures in the Statement On Ethics of Queen's University concerning 'research' and 'researcher' and the Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice adopted by ASA at its Annual Business Meeting in March 1999, and recently the AAA Statement On Ethics, May 20 2012. I conducted myself according to these and followed the code of ethical practice specified by the Society for Ethnomusicology.<sup>15</sup> I was responsible to the research community and its overall ethos, the research subjects, society in general and the funders of the relevant research. I recognise the need to identify, declare and try to avoid any potential conflicts of interest, and the unacceptability of plagiarism, deception and the fabrication or falsification of results.

In considering conducting research outside the United Kingdom, I was aware that irresponsible actions can jeopardize access to a research area or even a country for other researchers and I acted accordingly. Also I recognized that ethical and political issues relating to personal and national disparities in wealth, power, the legal status of the researcher, political interest and national political systems must be taken into account in planning my research along with differences between the civil, legal and financial position of national and foreign researchers and scholars.

I am responsible for the design, methodology and execution of my research and made sure the findings had demonstrable validity. I am also responsible for the distribution of research findings at the earliest opportunity in accordance with the primary purpose of the research, which is the increase of public knowledge and clarifying the disposition of any intellectual property-rights at the outset of the project. I acknowledge and credit fellow researchers who gave me permission to use their findings in my research project. Furthermore, I have considered the ethical acceptability and foreseeable consequences of my research, in particular:

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<sup>15</sup> See end of section for reference Various Authors 2001 and [www.indiana.edu/ethmusic](http://www.indiana.edu/ethmusic)

- a. The impact that my findings might have on the subjects of my research.
- b. I informed the subjects about the aims and implication of my research and got verbal consent for formal or informal interviews. At the same time I respected without prejudice the right of individual subjects to refuse to cooperate in research and to temporarily or permanently withdraw their participation.
- c. I protected my research-subjects from physical, psychological or social harm or suffering which they experienced in the course of my research, especially young children and elders.
- d. I have considered the possibility of detrimental consequences for my research-subjects arising out of the identification of individuals involved in the research and I discussed those with my consultants. They all suggested that I use their real names and gave me permission to publish the photos I include in this thesis.

Particular ethical issues arose in relation to my fieldwork: Agawu comments on ‘systematic deception’ and how this is such a big part of daily life in Africa, and that assumptions about the transparency of sayings can be very dangerous. But he claims that deception is necessary for successful fieldwork: ‘If deception is judged to be unethical, then the construction of an ethnography can never be an ethical process... Does not the unveiling of a certain form of truth qualify as unethical if it is likely to produce a tragic outcome? ... How ethical is a fictional ethnography?’ (Ibid; 212-3).

I strongly believe, like Bernard (2002), that all ethical issues arise from expectations: the expectations of the consultants and the ones of the researcher. I was responsible for my conduct in the field and represented myself honestly always asking permission to record or film interviews and performances. For this I used recorded permission. I am aware of copyright issues and believe that “negotiating mutually satisfactory agreements is the best precaution you can take to avoid being misunderstood later” (Various Authors 2001:13). Confidentiality was another issue and I followed all restrictions that my consultants placed. The topic of my research is particularly sensitive. Some performances are regarded sacred or particularly meaningful and I was prepared to provide reassurances against misuse of the material. I did not make judgments. I was there to respect the beliefs, customs, traditions and wishes of my consultants. I was willing to share information on research issues or topics

that colleagues might needed, avoiding secrecy, unless I was not allowed by my consultants to share such privileged information. However, that was never asked of me.

## **MAPPING OF THE THESIS**

As I have outlined, my research explores issues of musical experience, practice and performance in hunters' music in connection with the contemporary hunters' music scene, recording industry and radio productions. For this I employed the methodology of participant observation through apprenticeship to a hunters' master musician, Solomane Konate, with whom I learned how to play and experience hunters' music and performance. I travelled and participated in hunters' ceremonies and public events, followed him to recording sessions and documented recording practices and events, and learned the behavioural code and worldview of the hunters. By working closely with Ibrima DaMonzon Diarra of ORTM, and Issa Toure and other radio presenters of the private sector, along with music producers Siriman and Modibo Diallo, I show how these issues shape the hunters' music industry and are shaped by its circulation via mass media.

In Chapter One, I offer a brief overview of identity, social structure and status in Mande societies. I examine the literature on Mande hunters and explore specific themes in hunters' music literature, specifically the contexts of hunters' performances along with musical instruments and styles. I consider tradition in relation to musical style and contrast the griot tradition to the hunters' musical tradition. I comment on exoticism in hunters' music and go through the literature on cassettes and the music industry.

In Chapter Two, I discuss hunters' musical lineages and explore aspects of apprenticeship in hunters' musical tradition through practice, sound and experience. I discuss the process of initiation, the eligibility of apprentices, women players; lineages of knowledge, the master musicians and their interaction with apprentices, the learning process, teaching techniques and the subjects taught; what it means to be a *donsonkonifola* and the transition from apprentice to master.

In Chapter Three, I deal with different facets of hunters' music and discuss regional styles, musical instruments, tunings, aesthetics and symbolism; hunters' musicians and their generations, rivalry, substances abuse, and music ensembles. I examine hunters' repertoire as a dynamic tradition and discuss creativity and aesthetic

traits. I move on to talk about songs and hunting stories; and finally symbolism and meaning in hunters' rhythms. In Chapter Four, I contrast two hunters' performances: one sacred at the *dankun* in Kangaba and a public event, a wedding celebration, in Bamako.

In Chapter Five, I explore the hunters' music industry, cassettes as cultural products of sound, music production, recordings, legislation and logistics; I also describe and analyze a day in the studio with Solo and Modibo before moving on to comment on the various analogue and digital formats that are available in the Malian market. I finally examine the promotion of hunters' music and the issue of music piracy. Mediating sound is the theme of Chapter Six, and I discuss the role of the media, especially radio, in the presentation, transmission, dissemination and promotion of hunters' music. I discuss the role of radio presenters and analyze an evening at the ORTM with DaMonzon during his hunters' radio show; and another at Radio Donko where a distinguished *soma*, Mustapha Diallo, was interviewed.

In Chapter Seven, I consider the different audiences for hunters music and its popularity; popular hunters' musicians; reception and memory; divination; and the relevance of Mande concepts such as 'humanness' and 'hope' in a discussion about the popularity of hunters' music in contemporary Mali. The chapter is followed by my conclusions and afterword. In Appendix I, I provide the full Bamanankan text of Solo's praise song for *donsoba* Cemogo Doumbia, called *Ntana*, along with a translation in English. In Appendix II, I include a list of frequent abbreviations, facts of Bamako, local currency and a minimal list of websites with facts about the Republic of Mali. At the very end, and after the bibliography, I include a selected discography of hunters' music cassettes and compact discs.



# CHAPTER ONE

## CONTEXTS AND TEXTS

Mankanba, mankanba dia le ye Mankan ye  
Yalla Yalla,  
Namantroko, Namantroko banna sɔɔɔlu na<sup>16</sup>

### **IDENTITY, SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND STATUS IN MANDE**

In this chapter I examine the social, cultural and historical contexts within which ‘musical’ texts, both song texts and performances, exist. The existing literature on Mande hunters and music industry provide another context for my own research contribution to the field. Mande identity was established, arguably, during the Mande empire (1235 – 1469 A.D.). The empire was centred on the Mali/Guinea border. Sunjata Keita was the first emperor. Being a great warrior and hunter, he created an army of hunter-warriors (*donso*). In Maninka, great hunters, masters of the bush, are called *simbon*, which is also a praise name for Sunjata. His story lives on through the oral tradition of the *jeliw*. The *jeliw* are a hereditary group of musicians but they also perform a number of other roles, such as advisors, historians, cultural brokers, oral traditionalists and public speakers (Conrad 2002). They are part of the larger group of hereditary endogamous artisans (“specialised professionals”) called *ɲamakala* that also include the *numu* (blacksmiths), the *fune* (religious bards) and the *garanke* (leatherworkers) (Charry 2000; Conrad 1995; Hoffman 2000; McNaughton 1988).

Mande social structure was created, according to oral tradition, at the time of Sunjata (Austen 1999; Conrad 1995, 2002). Both social status and role are ascribed and expected but can change, increase or even get lost. For example, a born *jeli* can stop acting like one and acquire a *hɔrɔn* (noble) behaviour and eventually become *jelibobo* (mute *jeli*) (Kone 2006). The Mande peoples have an essential social ideology, most of which still applies today, especially in marriage between *hɔrɔn* and *ɲamakala* which is

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<sup>16</sup> Big noise, the sweetness of big noise is noise. Keep wandering, Namantroko, Namantroko will kill all the animals. (a hunters’ song; translation by the author).

still very rare. Endogamy among classes is still the rule in Mali. Society is patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal and is governed by male gerontocracy.

Identity and social status is inherited through the father, but the ability to realise your own destiny is determined by the behaviour of the mother (who has to conform with gender ideology). As Jackson (1989:38) puts it, ‘while one’s social status and name are given through descent, one’s temperament and destiny are shaped by one’s mother’s *influence* (italics in the original).’ Identity in the Manden world is called *fasiya*, literally father’s ethnicity, but it is rather more than that. *Si* or *siya* also connote seed. A seed planted will reproduce itself. In this regard *si* and *siya* can be perceived as essence. The Manden *jeli* praising the *hɔrɔn*, for example, may say ‘your forebears are older than you but they are not better than you,’ meaning that people and ascendants are of the same essence (Kone 2006). Polygamy leads to rivalry between children of same father but different mothers, and is called *fadenya*. *Fadenya* is an important motive behind heroic deeds (rivalry between younger and older brothers; an excellent example of this is the case of Sunjata [Belcher 1999; Bird 1980, 1999; Charry 2000; Conrad 1995, 1999, 2004; Diawara 1993; Herbert 1993; McNaughton 1988; Niane 1960]). According to Jackson (1989:38), ‘it is the interplay of formal determinants and informal influences which decides a person’s destiny, [therefore] we could say that “to be born is both to be born of the world and to be born into the world. The world is already constituted, but also never completely constituted; in the first case we are acted upon, in the second we are open to an infinite number of possibilities” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:453).’

Even today, the stratification of Mande society consists of three arguably distinguishable classes (Cashion 1984; Charry 2000; Conrad 1995, 2002; Diawara 1993; McNaughton 1988; Tamari 1995; Traore 1999): Hɔrɔn: (freeborn or noble); free to create their own destiny through heroic behaviour – the *ɲana*, is the person of action (at least this is the idealised concept). Today they are mostly farmers, merchants, involved in politics etc. and in pre-colonial times, warriors and hunters. Ɔnamakala: these have ascribed professions and their social status cannot be heroic. They are not people of action but those who deal with esoteric power (see also above). A symbiotic relationship exists between the people of action - *ɲana* - and the people of the word – *ɲara*. For example, the *hɔrɔn* does the deed, the *jeli* sings about it and tells the story. An important point needs clarification here; *ɲara* is the highest stage/status an artisan caste may achieve. For the *jeli* there is a distinction between *ɲara* (“star”) and *kumala*

(speaker). One can achieve *ɲaraya* (“stardom”) in *kuma* (speech=performance) though one may not qualify as *kumala* (authoritative competent speech performer) (Kone 2005).

*Jɔn*: slaves, captives during the pre-colonial period. Slavery in Mali was abolished in 1896 but the slaves were not freed until 1908 (Duran 2006; Meillassoux 1991). Today members of this class are the descendants of captives and carry stigma. They have social licence, their own songs, music and dances. The actual meaning of the word *jɔn* is first generation slave. It is wrongly used, even among native Bamana, to refer to the descendants of slaves, who are rightly called *woloso*, meaning locally born slaves (*wolo*=born, *so*=home) (Kone; 2005). The specific subject of *jɔn* is very under-researched with lots of gaps that need to be filled in.

## **THEMES IN HUNTERS’ MUSIC LITERATURE**

In this section, I review the hunters’ music literature thematically by pulling together critical strands in the thesis: hunters’ performance; musical instruments; tradition and style; music skills in comparison to other music genres in Mali ; and exoticism in hunters’ music.

## **CONTEXTS OF HUNTERS’ PERFORMANCES**

Music is socially meaningful largely but not entirely because it provides means by which people recognise identities and places, and the boundaries that separate them (Stokes 1994: 5).

Hunters’ identity in Mali goes beyond ethnicity and social structure. For a contemporary Malian in search of a Malian identity with roots in the great ancient empire (*Maliba*), the hunter (and the hunters’ society) provides an important role model. The model allows for individual identity to be promoted within a collective group which defies the old prevailing order of inherited social status and clan lineage. The initiated hunter (*donso*) has acquired a certain mystique (Duran 2000) because of his courage and stamina in the bush, his moral values and his knowledge of the healing properties of plants and trees. Hunters (*donsow*) are perceived in a range of ways by Malian peoples. These include as: animal hunters (*sɔgɔ donso*); warriors (*kɛlɛcɛw*); healers (*soma*;

possessors of *yiridon*: science of the trees); sorcerers (*subaga*); those who open up new roads, i.e. adventurers, wanderers (*tunkaranke*: the male stranger or visitor, the “immigrant strangers” [Herbert 1993]). Master hunters are called *simbon*. Hunters have their own worldview and behavioural code, as described by Cashion (1984) and Cisse (1994). They are known as carriers of certain moral values such as courage, integrity, endurance (*munya*), generosity and loyalty, which are celebrated in the hunters’ songs.

In the first two decades of Mali’s independence (1960-80), the music of the *Mande jeliw* or griots, hereditary professional musicians, was used to promote a national Malian identity (Charry 2000; Duran 1999). During the 1980s, with the withdrawal of government subsidy and disenchantment with the military regime, new forms of music emerged which drew on the model of hunters’ music. Women, excluded from hunters’ societies, also contributed to these new forms of music (Duran 2000).

The music associated with hunters’ rituals is the most accessible manifestation of the hunters’ ethos. Hunters’ music is admired across Malian society for that reason, and is widely listened to on cassette and televised recordings of hunters’ gatherings, reinforcing the central place hunters hold in the Malian psyche. Furthermore, the explosion of private radio stations has also contributed to the widespread circulation of hunters’ music, rituals and ethos. Radio Liberte, for example, has a weekly programme that airs every Sunday. During the show, they play hunters’ music, interview great hunters and discuss issues of the hunters’ community. Meanwhile, listeners call to make comments and ask questions. The most frequent types of greetings amongst the presenter and callers are “*I Dansɔgɔ*” (trans. You, the limit penetrator), “*I ni ko*” (trans. You and the matter), “*Ta ani sisi*” (trans. Fire and smoke).<sup>17</sup> These greetings acknowledge the hunter as the one and only person capable of leaving the safety of the village and finding his way to the bush where dark powers and spirits live. He is the one who has both courage and knowledge to penetrate the limit/border of the village and wander to the unpredictable and the unknown; to find new areas for settlement, to hunt and kill the most dangerous animals such as the buffalo, the lion, the hippopotamus and the elephant using his locally made musket rifle which once loaded produces a blast of fire and a cloud of smoke. These traditional muskets are used extensively in ceremonies to establish the hunters’ presence. Radio Liberte travels to villages throughout Mali, in

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<sup>17</sup> Meaning respectively: “You who open new frontiers, who go beyond the limits”, “You and the matter – the eternal unknown/the unpredictable”, “Fire and smoke, material and power” (Kone 2006).

order to attend and report on hunters' events such as naming ceremonies, funerals, or the acquisition of a boli (fetish) by a hunter, as such occasions are accompanied by donsonkoni performance (Kone 2006).



Fig. 1  
Gunpowder at work: firing traditional, locally made muskets is part of hunters' performance (March 2010).

Hunters, as a discrete and identifiable social group, date back to the time of Sunjata at the beginning of the 13th century AD, at least. They probably formed his army. Sunjata himself was a hunter. "The hunter king is as much a cliché as the blacksmith king: he's the immigrant stranger, bringing civilisation and new technologies" (Herbert 1993:165; Duran 2000). Sunjata's victory over Sumaworo, the blacksmith king, was thanks to his ability as a hunter/warrior (McNaughton 1995).

Daama Gille was also a great hunter, a healer with a reputation and a geomancer. Sunjata constantly tested him against unconquerable enemies. Daama Gille hunted great game and managed to carry his kill to local villages, thus becoming a food-bringing father. In the Maninka-language praise song written in his honour, he is named *donsolu benba* (The father of hunters) (Diawara 1993).



Fig. 2: Hunters gathering under a tree during a post-funerary hunters ceremony in Kamale. Usually these gatherings are held at the edge of the village in an area with trees and plantation that symbolizes the bush (June 2010).

Hunters' societies/associations/brotherhoods run counter to Mande social structure<sup>18</sup> by including members from different ethnic backgrounds and social and age groups. For example, hunters can be either nobles or blacksmiths, young or old, Mande, Fula etc. The eligibility of *jeliw* and *fune* is not fully known although I was able to discover that *jeliw* can become hunters. In 2004 Kasse Mady Diabate, one of the most respected *jeli* in Mali and Guinea, said that *jeliw* can become hunters and continued by making a joke "but there is no time for a *jeli* to hunt! We are too busy praising other people!" In any case, I was able to confirm the existence of *jeli* hunters from two different sources. First, a colleague of mine, Ryan Skinner,<sup>19</sup> who has worked around Kita and Bamako, told me that there are plenty of *jeli* hunters in Kita although these

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix I: Identity, Social Structure and Status in Mande Societies.

<sup>19</sup> Ryan Skinner was a PhD student at Columbia University NY. He was looking at music and urban space both in Bamako and New York among Malian communities. He is now assistant professor of Music and African Studies at Ohio State University.

days the town is suffering from extensive immigration to Mali's capital or Europe. Second, Kassim Kone, a distinguished Malian scholar and academic, confirmed the existence of jeli hunters amongst the Bamana people in Mali (Kone 2005). I have also come across many jeli hunters in the Mande heartland, southwest of Bamako. What needs investigation is whether jeliw can become hunter's bards or musicians; I never met a jeli that is a donsonkonifola. Regarding the fune, they have always been associated with Islam (fune is a Soninke word). It is understandable that few of them will be hunters (donso) due to the animistic nature of the hunter's worldview (Cashion 1984).

Hunters' societies, associations, fraternities or brotherhoods (donsotɔn) are initiation societies that are formed locally, are widespread all over Mali and are estimated by some writers to include as many as 100,000 members. Every Bamana or Maninka village of 400 or more inhabitants has a hunters' society (Cisse 1994:52). Societies are hierarchically based on experience and point of entry into the society. If, for example, the son enters the association before the father, the father refers to the son as his master. Members of a hunters' society (donsotɔn) meet on special occasions. These include:

- (1) Ceremonial or sacred<sup>20</sup> (nanfɛn) occasions. These are occasions such as the initiation of a new member, which happens at the dankunson ceremony (sacrifice at the cross roads) at the end of the harvest season, symbolising rebirth of hunters' societies (Charry 2000: 68). Other such occasions would be the acquisition of a new power object (boli) by an existing member (this happens especially at the end of the dry season, May /June); and the death, funeral and memorial ceremonies for a member of the association.
- (2) Informal or secular (nɛnɛjɛ) occasions. These are playful entertainment occasions, such as public holidays; the New Year celebration (sanyɛlɛma); the period after the end of Iid el Fitr (Ramadan) or Iid el Adha (Tabaski), where Muslims and non Muslim get together; the end of the harvest season; and visits by film crews (including Malian TV) or local pop stars e.g. Oumou Sangare, Salif Keita.

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<sup>20</sup> These terms were introduced by James Brink (Duran 2006; Kone 2006; Brink 1977, 1978, 1980, 1981).



The music performed in these gatherings is played by hunters' musicians, who may either be hunters themselves or not. These achieved, as opposed to hereditary, musicians are trained through apprenticeship to a master hunters' musician. They are not *jelis*. They call themselves *donso donkilidala* (hunters' singer) or *donsonkonifola* (hunters' harp player) or *jurufokɔnɔ* (the bird who makes the strings speak) or *kɔnɔ* (bird, songbird, a term to designate achieved rather than ascribed status as musician) (Duran 1995, 2000). Having said that, I was informed (Kone 2005) that in the Segu region, they are called *donsojeli* though no *jeli* ethnicity or status is implied.

### **HUNTERS' INSTRUMENTS AND MUSIC STYLES**

According to Charry (2000), two styles of hunters' music exist in Mali: the Maninka and the Wasulu style. Charry, though, fails to mention a third style, that of the Bamana. The latter has hardly been researched. Adama Coulibaly, a *donsonkoni* player for Salif Keita, describes and evaluates it as "boring, with very few rhythms. I prefer the Wasulu [style]" (Coulibaly 2004). From the recordings I have heard, it is a slower, more 'laid back' type of playing and singing, with a rich repertoire that needs further investigation.

The musical instrument in Wasulu, called *donsonkoni*, is one of the most ancient West African harps. A six string harp with two sets of strings in two parallel rows with alternate pentatonic tuning, it is always accompanied by the metal scraper called *karijan* and sometimes by the hunters' whistle called *sufle* (death whistle, Kone 2006). The harp, made of calabash, does not require the blacksmiths' tools in order to be built.<sup>21</sup> *Donsonkoni* always accompany the singing.

The epic songs called *donso maana*, are about great, legendary hunters and their struggles with the animal kingdom and forest spirits. They involve a lead singer, a chorus, and a *naamu namina* (*naamu* = yes in Arabic, *namina* = response) who is confirming the truthfulness of the singer's text every one or two phrases by saying *naamu*. The epics are large collections of song texts. For example, Bala Djimba Diakite's repertoire centres on the three best-known *simbi* (Maninka, heptatonic, 7-string on a single rank, calabash harp) pieces but his core repertory of song texts concerning the odysseys of 45 hunter heroes (*gwede*) lasts around 5 hours (Charry 2000:82 n20).

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<sup>21</sup> The iron rattler at the end of the neck, however, is made by blacksmiths (Enkerli 2006).



Charles Bird (1972: 279-80) has grouped hunters' music into three interrelated categories, perhaps conflating the Maninka and Wasulu repertoires: 1. Amusement songs where anyone can participate, which can be sped up to accommodate the athletic dancing of young hunters; 2. Ritual songs that are related to the hunt and are restricted to those who have earned a reputation as hunters; and 3. Heroic works for listening at the end of ceremonies, such as the ones mentioned above (Charry 2000: 83). I can confirm this categorisation but have expanded it into sub-divisions in Chapter Three. I have also found that there are special incantations performed in private to activate the medicinal remedies (traditional medicines) that many hunters make as part of their trade.

Hunters' songs can be slow or fast. They might also have parts in different tempi to facilitate dancing. Hunters usually dance in a circle handling their muskets or rifles and firing them from time to time. Every now and then when the music speeds up, they will perform a solo dance, which is very fast. These songs are immensely popular throughout Mali among hunters and non-hunters, and have been the inspiration behind the music of many contemporary artists, including Oumou Sangare, Salif Keita, Kasse Mady Diabate, and Habib Koite. On street corners in Bamako, cassettes of hunter's music are characteristically sold. In the Hotel Mande where I stayed a couple of times, people used to listen to them by the pool while swimming or enjoying refreshments. This is one of the reasons some contemporary non-jeli artists, like Salif and Oumou, choose to identify with hunters' music (see also Duran 1995a, 1995b, 1999, 2000, 2005; Keita 2004). The music is popular in part because it has powerful rhythms and interesting melodies, but more importantly, because it is the most accessible manifestation of hunters' rituals, and symbolises the values that urbanizing Malians admire in hunters.<sup>22</sup>

## **TRADITION AND MUSICAL STYLE**

'The Malian hunter is the beginning of a civilisation. He is the continuation of a civilization. He is the consequence of a civilization. The hunter's

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<sup>22</sup> For a similar discussion regarding nostalgia and desire for things past in relation to Country music in North American urban spaces, see Fox (2004).

tradition has no beginning, and will have no end.’ Mamadou Jatigui Diarra (Eyre 2000: 157)

This is a very old musical tradition and some operational or contextual definitions need to be made. The *donsonkoni* is perceived by western scholars as the predecessor of the *kora* (Charry 1994, 1996, 2000). In this sense the *donsonkoni* assumes a timeless notion (Kone 2006). Furthermore, Duran (Liner notes to the CD “Kulanjan” 1999) refers to ‘...the ancient music of the hunters that has recently been revived in Mali as a popular style called *wassoulou*.’ Secondly, ‘old’ is a word that is normally used these days to situate something in the previous or last few centuries. Evidence leads us to assume that the musical tradition of hunters is at least seven centuries old, which to many people makes it ‘ancient.’ ‘One might speculate that the institution of harp-playing hunter’s musician-priests can have its origins in the first millennium B.C.E. when agriculture began to definitely take hold in the savanna, if not earlier’ (Charry 2000: 67).

I am inclined to use the expression ‘musical tradition’, as opposed to ‘traditional music’. The reason is that I feel more comfortable with it as it implies a certain form of continuity. Daniel Reed (2003:174) writes, ‘Traditional arts can be a means through which performers ingest and digest the world, selecting new ideas and reshaping them to represent and shape their identities and feed their own needs.’ Friedson (1996:7) suggests, ‘Tradition is not a static construct, a thing to be met, but the liminal<sup>23</sup> moment itself. Boundaries are not ideological here, they are experiential; they are not rigid but fluid possibilities.’ The concept of traditional music gives a sense of being fixed, ‘frozen in time’, remaining unchanged as if it is or has been isolated from external factors: a music that has not been affected by acculturation, social change and ultimately, other musical traditions. As with all societies and their musics, the musical tradition I am researching here, is a dynamic one.

Two more definitions need to be clarified. First, when referring to “the bush” I mean the countryside, the forest where wild animals and predators, *jine* and spirits live<sup>24</sup>. It is a place outside the safe confines of the city, town or village. It is the place

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<sup>23</sup> Liminal comes from the Latin *limin* meaning threshold. Victor Turner (1969) adopted the term from van Gennep’s model of *rites de passage*.

<sup>24</sup> *Jinn* or *jine* is the Bamana word for genie, spirit or demon.

where hunters go to kill for meat and where the ordinary man, woman or child would never go (Spencer 1986). It is a place of uncertainty, mystery and danger (Jackson 1989). Jackson (1990, 1998) parallels Kuranko's<sup>25</sup> idiomatic distinction between the bush and the village with the western cultural distinction of extraordinary and ordinary 'frames of awareness' (ibid: 73), and points out that the Kuranko interpret memory as a registration of the mind of an event happening somewhere else; and conscience as 'residing in social relationships and not in the individual psyche and regard the unconscious not as some profound level of the mind but as a kind of social space - the shadowy domain beyond the perimeter of one's village' (ibid). In Bamanankan the bush is called kungo, wula or nanyan (Bird 1977). Second, mankan, as it appears at the beginning of this chapter, translates as "noise" (ibid). But it can also mean loud discussion, verbal fighting, harsh exchange and gunshot (Diakite 2006). A donsonkonifola will say to the hunter "Mankan b'l ko" which translates as "You have noise behind you all the time" (ibid). Because when great hunters quietly go into the bush, they will eventually make noise, they will shoot and kill.<sup>26</sup>

In a discourse about the musical tradition of the Mande hunters, a comparison with another Mande tradition and its musicians seems unavoidable. I am referring to the music of the jeliw. Jelis<sup>27</sup> or griots and their repertoire have been extensively studied (Beltcher 1999; Bird 1980, 1999; Charry 2000; Conrad 1995, 1999; Duran 1995a, 1999, 2000; Hoffman 2000, Eyre 2000). There are some parallels to hunters' musicians but also many differences. Both strands of musicians are praise singers but operate in different contexts. Griots are ascribed (hereditary) musicians whilst donsonkonifola are achieved ones. Griots may become hunters but I have no evidence as to whether they can or do become donsonkonifola. If that is true, then we need to know why. One explanation could be that griots are historically more associated with Islam. As I have mentioned above that the fune have been associated with the Soninke (Conrad 1995:86-132; Kone 2005), which literally means 'pagan'. Soninke were the first Mande

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<sup>25</sup> The Kuranko of Sierra Leone are a Mande people like the Bamana and the Maninka. According to Kassim Kone (personal communication 2013) the Kuranko are very close to the Bamana and the Maninka both linguistically and culturally.

<sup>26</sup> A question like 'what is music' arise here, or what other scholars have discussed as 'music' being one category within a soundscape (Feld 1982, Wade 2004).

<sup>27</sup> The Western Sudanic tale tells of the two travelling brothers one of whom, in a moment of hunger cuts part of his body to feed this brother is widespread. The other brother who is younger sings his praises, and the elder becomes the noble while the younger becomes his jeli (Conrad 1995: 105)

to convert to Islam<sup>28</sup>. Kings who converted to Islam had to leave the animistic *donsonkonifola* and *numu* (blacksmith) for the more Muslim-associated *jeli*. Muslim kings tend to move away from blacksmiths (but remained influenced by them) towards the *jelis* (Kone 2005).

### **COMPARING SKILLS OF THE HUNTERS' MUSICIANS AND JELIW**

In more recent history, the praise song of the griots does not require proof of a deed. A griot is usually attached to a noble and praises – always with embellishments – his lineage and bravery, but not necessarily an actual act. A *donsonkonifola* on the contrary praises – still with embellishments - a hunter for acts that are ‘true’ and he has proof of. One cannot praise a great hunter for a kill that had not fed a few people. So truth matters (Kone 2005). Another point is that griots mostly function in the city, the town, the village—they are “city dwellers” (Kone 2005), whilst *donsonkonifolaw*, like hunters, relate to the bush (*ibid*). Conrad (2002: 11) citing Jansen (2000:5-7) points out that, ‘One of the most fundamental distinctions [is] that hunters work in the wilderness transforming wild game into food, in contrast to the *pamakalaw* who are occupied with social transformations within the village.’ There are certain logistics to this. A patron has to acquire power and wealth, the means to support many *jeliw* for their praising. On the other hand, a *donsonkonifola* has many (up to hundreds) of ‘patrons’, hunters. They provide the *donsonkonifola* with meat, cola nuts etc. The *donsonkonifola* is their ‘wife’ (Kone 1996, 2005; Traore 1999; Sidibe 2007). He then, can have one or more favourite husbands/patrons/hunters. What is striking here is the absolute reversal of gender roles. The Muslim patron has many wives (polygyny) and many *jeliw*; the animistic hunters ‘share’ one wife, their praise singer – *donsonkonifola* (symbolic polyandry). *Fadenya* (the rivalry between father and son, but also between brothers from different mothers) does not rise to the surface as it does in other Manden spheres of competition. The hunters’ ethos excludes *fadenya*, making it a dormant phenomenon in the hunters’ association. It is “the hunter that goes bad, not the hunting association” as an institution: (“*Donso de be tiyen, donsoya te tiyen*”, Kone 2006).

“*N’l taara tunka fe, n’l ma fen sɔrɔ, l na fen dɔn*”: When you go abroad, if you don’t get (any)thing, you will learn (some)thing (Kone 2005). Innovation is the motivation for hunters’ movements. They are the ones who find water by following the

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<sup>28</sup> Islam is present in West Africa since the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD.

animals to a pond. They know the secrets of the plants by watching the animals, e.g. if they see a snake been bitten by another, they follow it until it finds a certain plant to feed. That plant then is the antidote to the other's snake venom. Hunters also build roads during their explorations in the bush, and build new towns in strategic spots. They are the keepers of the secret in making gunpowder.

The hunters control *ɲama*. *ɲama* is perceived as 'the world's basic energy, the energy that animates the universe' (McNaughton 1988: 15). It is a potentially dangerous force that can be deadly. Bird (1974) calls it the 'energy of action'. It is the necessary power source behind every movement or task and is a by-product of every task (McNaughton 1988). It is necessary for hunters to possess large amounts of *ɲama*, which they acquire by killing lots of animals. Animals with large stores of *ɲama* are usually predators like lions, big pachyderms like elephants, or fierce and aggressive loners such as buffalos. Smaller more delicate and vulnerable animals, for example a little antelope (duikers), have lots of *ɲama* that protects them from hunters. But it is not just animals that have *ɲama*. Other living beings have it, like orphans, for example. Many Mande proverbs show that: "A lion that does not behave as a lion has no *ɲama*" or "If you slap an orphan, it releases ten times the *ɲama* that a non orphan does" (Kone 2005). McNaughton also points out to the release of *ɲama* during iron smelting, when transformation occurs from ore to a certain shape at the forge (1988). All great sorcerers are either great hunters or blacksmiths<sup>29</sup> or even both, because of the possession of *ɲama*. It is the job of the *donsonkonifola* to praise great hunters, the hunt, or the deeds, and to draw a line from the ancestors of hunters, the deities of Saane and Kontoron<sup>30</sup> (see Traore 1999:180-3) to the praising hunters. These praise songs and epics constitute the repertoire of the *donsonkonifola*.

The hunters' music tradition is related to an ancient way of life that is disappearing but somehow simultaneously seems to be thriving. Helen Rees in her brilliant study *Echoes of History: Naxi Music in Modern China* (Rees 2000: 23-4) points out that one needs to be aware of tendencies such as 'domestic orientalism' in which the minorities are presented as an exotic alternative to the mainstream (in her

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<sup>29</sup> Robertson discusses blacksmiths and altars in Ghana (ibid 1993, Solie 1993). For a comparable discussing of metal working professions and spirituality in a different context see Judith and Alton Becker on bronze workers who make the gongs of the Javanese gamelan possibly brought to mainland Southeast Asia from India (ibid 1981, Steiner 1981).

<sup>30</sup> Variant terms: Sane and Kondolon, Sanin and Kontron (Traore 1999). On ancestral spirits, see also Robertson (1976, 1979).

case the Han) in any examination of minority culture and its promotion to the outside world. She draws parallels to situations outside China and specifically refers to Kofi Agawu's article 'Representing African Music' (1992), where the author gives examples of what he terms 'the motif of the music-making African' (1992:248) and criticizes this Orientalizing tendency as a 'scholarly plot seeking difference between Africa and the West'.

Clearly, hunters are not an ethnic minority but some analogies are there to be examined. This is not a new, constructed tradition, as for example the new folk movement in Bulgaria (Rice 1994). Instead, it has been suggested (Knight 1973; Eyre 2000) that hunters' musicians maintained and rescued some of the griots' traditional roles for more than six hundred years. The itinerant musicians performed long musical epics to praise brave hunters (see also Cashion 1984). Malians consider hunters to be a powerful group of people with special esoteric powers. Hunters are also healers that use herbal medicines to cure the sick. During the course of my research, I investigated connections with shamanism, spirit possession and exorcism (sometimes hunters are called to expel the unwelcome persisting spirits [Kone 2006]), the role of herbs and substances and the role of music in the process of preparation and healing.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately the space limitations here do not permit further discussion of these.

The music of Mali's hunters is not "pop" music, and it has no direct government support, yet it is very highly esteemed and cassette recordings are much in demand throughout Mali both in rural and urban areas. My topic of research provides a unique case study of preservation and creativity in a very old oral tradition.<sup>32</sup> I examined the extent to which this repertoire is dynamic and how it holds both a high degree of retention and creativity. Changes in both musical and textural structure can happen because of social change, and as a consequence of feedback from popular culture (Blacking 1995; Merriam 1964; Nettl 1983; Rice 1994). I investigated the extent that this has occurred due to socio-political reasons, as well as the effects of tourism, popular music and the music industry.

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<sup>31</sup> For a discussion on music, medicine and healing see also Roseman (1991)

<sup>32</sup> See also Rice (1987) who discusses studying music individually, socially and historically.

## EXOTICISM IN HUNTERS' MUSIC

Banning Eyre found this music 'darkly exotic but conjured familiar associations like old slave work songs of the American South, blues and funk, suggesting that this could be rock 'n' roll's African Ancestry' (2000:157-8). Issues of exoticism have been explored by many scholars, both academics (Torgovnick 2000) and critics (Toop 1995, 1999). Exoticism in music is also one of the issues investigated in *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation and Appropriation in Music* (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000), an edited volume in which different authors take a 'postmodern' turn on 'modernism' and the other. The appropriation of 'world music' by EuroAmerican and other cosmopolitan industry leaders is also explored by Meintjes (1990: 47) who places it in a series of power-inflected terms: 'a process of appropriation, exploitation and domination', and Feld (1998), whilst Rice suggests that if we are to use this term when dealing with third-world material, since it 'is a useful philosophical concept to describe how our socially and historically positioned selves understand other worlds, we may want to use terms such as misappropriation or expropriation for the most ethically vexing instances' (Rice 1994:320n7).

On the one hand, the music of the hunters, to my knowledge, has not yet been appropriated by first-world musicians (the jazz trumpeter Don Cherry is one of a very few western musicians who plays the donsonkoni). Recently, however, the release of William Parker's CD<sup>33</sup> *Long Hidden: The Olmec Series* (2006), and *Double Sunrise Over Neptune* (2008) seems to have changed that. On the other hand, from within the country, many Malian musicians, such as Salif Keita, have claimed a hunter's identity. Others have used instruments and songs from the hunters' traditions; for example, Banzumana Sissoko played donsonkoni musical phrases on his jeli ngoni (Kone 2005). Recently, African Americans such as bluesman Taj Mahal are beginning to show an interest in hunters' music as having been a possible source of the blues. Taj Mahal recorded the album *Kulanjan* with Toumani Diabate in 1999, a recording which '... brings together these two traditions [hunters' music and griots' music] – both at the roots of the blues – and re-unites them with their long-lost brother, the finger-picking blues' (Duran, liner notes to the CD).

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<sup>33</sup> Parker is a New York-based, free jazz double-bass player who has recorded and performed extensively both as a soloist and as a member of all shapes and sizes of ensembles, throughout his forty year old career.

Most published cassettes of hunters' music contain short entertainment songs. From what I know donsonkonifolaw such as Sekouba Traore (SD 065), Amadu Sangare (SD 116), Yoro Sidibe (SD 084, MSG 6297), Sambu(ni) Diakite (SD 016, SD 034, SD 035, SD036) and Baala Guimba Diakite (Mali K7 S.A.) have recorded up to one-hour long performances on the histories of great hunters. According to my consultants, these are not considered sacred epics but rather oral histories cherished tales and important texts.

## LITERATURE ON MANDE HUNTERS

The Mande hunters have been studied from several points of view: their worldview, cosmology and customs (Cashion 1984, Cisse 1994); their oral traditions: epic tales of the struggle between the hunters and wild animals (Bird 1972, 1974; Cashion 1984; Cisse 1994; Coulibaly 1985; Thoyer 1978, 1995); and the mystique surrounding them in urban Malian popular culture (Duran 2000).

Their musical traditions, which they consider sacred, are not only rich, but also very popular in Mali itself. Yet to date there have been no studies of the music itself except for a short section by Charry, who bases his findings on two brief encounters with a single musician (Charry 2000:61-89). In this section I would like to take the reader through some of the existing literature on the topic, most of which has already been mentioned in the introduction.

In my research, I did not find anything regarding Mande hunters and/or their music prior to Cisse's article (1964), which has already been discussed and which I refer to later in this section.<sup>34</sup> There are a few articles (Bassett 2003, 2004; Ferme 2004; Hagberg 2004; Hellweg 2004; Leach 2004; Traore 2004) that deal with Mande hunters and their associations in relation to civil society and the state (but not their music), which the reader can consult. Furthermore, ethnomusicologists such as Heather Maxwell, Alexander Enkerli and Cullen Strawn have submitted (Maxwell 2002) their doctoral dissertations on the popular music of Wasulu (Maxwell 2002) and the music of the Wasulu hunters (Enkerli pending, Strawn 2011). Therefore I begin with what seems to be the first major study, by a western scholar, of Mande hunters and their folklore.

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<sup>34</sup> I have looked in numerous academic journals for earlier accounts on the topic, such as *Journal de la Societe des Africanistes*, *Cashiers d' Etude Africaine*, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, *African Social Research*, *African Studies Review*, *Africa*, *African Arts*, and *Africa Today*.



Cashion's unpublished dissertation (1982) remains the most cited study of Mande hunters and related traditions. Cashion studied selected aspects of folklore within the ecologically complex whole of hunters' culture and society in order to set forth a worldview of the people who are regular participants in it. After an introduction of the general research done on the hunters in Africa in general and West Africa in particular, he introduces the research done on Mande hunters citing Bird, Cisse and Coulibaly as the main authors of relevant texts. He then proceeds to review theory in folklore, giving definitions where relevant and a formulation of field methodology. The physical world of the hunters, historical information and the social structure (clan, lineage, family, village associations, age sets, initiation societies and hunters associations) and finally the economic setting, are neatly squeezed into 30 pages. Cashion gives a lot of information on hunters' gear, such as the clothing (tunics, trousers, hats, bags, belts, iron traps, hammocks, cords and flashlight) and on arms, guns, knives and any symbolism that these might carry, giving particular attention to the hunter fetishes. He describes ceremonies of birth; the *daknun-son* (the crossroads sacrifice), which is the initiation of a new hunter as a child of Sanene and a younger brother of Kontron, it is the beginning of a different life; and ceremonies of death, *janaja* (funeral ceremony), where funeral and praise songs for the deceased hunter are played and sung.

Cashion also looks at techniques of the hunt and other customs, practices and rituals before talking about the oral folklore and the hunters' epic. On the latter, he discusses form and structure, the praise singer (who he calls *donsojeli*), the musical instruments, his performance, the context and content of performance, as well as audience perceptions. Again he cites Bird and Coulibaly and mentions several recordings that he made and performances he attended, such as Toumani Kone's from Djeguenina, Yanfolila. This information is invaluable; two epic songs – *Famori* and *Manden Mori* – that he includes in the Appendix with translations were the most useful for my research. These were performed by Seydou Camara and were recorded in 1977 and 1976 respectively. Cashion concludes his landmark thesis with the behavioural code and worldview of the Mande hunters, giving 37 different rules. As Cashion points out (*ibid*: 321), future paths should point to the influence of Islam and Islamic sufism that may or may not have influenced the cult of the saint (and the music – my addition), as well as the extent to which hunters have influenced the expansion of long-distance trade

and commerce in the Western Sudan, the south and the Atlantic coast. Another very important issue is the use of pharmacological plants and medicinal practices of the hunters. Research has been done (Imperato 1977a) but hardly touches upon the hunters' knowledge. And information on neighbouring hunters' associations or their music has been scarce. Material culture is not at all documented (tunics, fetishes et al) apart from brief discussions of the musical instruments (Cisse 1964, 1994; Charry 2000).

Another very important study is *La confrerie des chasseurs Malinke et Bambara: Mythes, rites et recits initiatiques* by Youssouf Tata Cisse (1994). Cisse, an ethnologist and initiated hunter, has written extensively on many different topics such as sacrifices at the crossroads, the komo societies and the Mande hunters' associations. Apart from this publication there is an article (Cisse 1964) where he deals with the Mande hunters. He points out (1964:189) that this music is welcoming and public as opposed to 'komo drumming and the like which are threatening and private' (Charry 2000: 8). He refers to the death of a *donsoba* (great hunter) and mentions the importance of the death songs that carry the traditions, historic chants and myths of the hunters. These remain at the bedside of the hunter sung by the *sora* (bard) because their role is to gather the *nama* of the deceased. The aspiration of every hunter is to be honoured one day by a hunter's *fasa* (praise song) that will elevate him to the pantheon of great hunters (Cisse 1964: 209-11). He talks about the hierarchizing of hunters into *kər ɔ* and *dɔgɔ* (older and younger brothers) as a function solely of the length of time they have been hunting, and the exclusion of other considerations, which make the rigid structure of Mande society such as age, *famaya* (strength), *horonya* (nobility), *dyoya* (slavery) and *fasya* (father's ethnic group) (ibid; 186). Cisse strongly believes that *donsoya* predates the formation of Mande society and the influence of Islam (ibid: 176). The hunter was able to provide food, especially in times of drought and famine, which enabled society to survive. This elevated hunters to heroes (ibid: 189). Reporting on the Maninka hunters' societies, Cisse makes remarks that imply a panethnic fraternity: 'the children of Sanene and Kontron are neither Maninka nor Bambara, Senufo, Bobo, Peuls, neither black nor white, although they may be a little of all that' and 'from the moment we concentrate ourselves to hunting we are by rights the children of Sanin and Kontron, no matter what our religion, race, homeland, totem, customs, social condition' (cf. Charry 2000: 82 n.18; Cisse 1964: 178, 186).

Cisse (1994) refers to what the Anglophone bibliography calls associations or societies or fraternities, as 'brotherhoods'. In his book he gives historical information on the first simbo (great hunters), the worship of the ancestors (manyan), the Kakolo clans, the birth of the hunters' brotherhood and the komo cult. He talks about the myth of Sanene and Kontron as gods of the hunt and the dankun triangle as a symbol of birth (ibid: 110-14), and also about the structure of the brotherhood, initiation ceremonies, the morals and worship, and the training and education (both practical and ideological). He portrays the hunter and his musician (again referring to him as donsojeli or sora) and refers to the animals of the hunt, the vulture, the crocodile, and the python. He focuses on the importance of the crossroads as the beginning and end, a point where two roads meet only once, a kind of liminal space. He also refers to the deities, the myths, pama and its manifestations and the struggle against it. Cisse devotes a chapter to the hunters' fetishes (boli) and the harp-lute (sic), and then moves on to describe the rituals, ceremonies and customs regarding the birth and death of hunters. What follows are tales of the hunt and the story of Boli Nanan in full transcription and translation in French. Cisse points out that kənə (bird) is a common metaphor and title used for ascribed musicians amongst the Maninka and Wasulu hunters. He explains that the brotherhood of the hunters remains the conservator of the true values of the Mande civilization. Cisse (ibid: 54) sheds light on the significance of ritual songs when he talks about certain songs with special meanings, which are sung for distinguished hunters. 'Janjon', for example, is reserved for brave hunters that are known for their coolness, fearlessness and courage. 'Koulanjan' is sung for hunters known for their hunting skills and 'Duga' (vulture) for the ones who have been gravely injured in war and is sung during funerals of great hunters.

Cisse (ibid: 57) argues that proverbs are part of the pedagogical material master hunters deliver to their students. The proverbs are repeated over and over to the apprentices to make them aware of the hardships of the hunt as soon as they become apprentices to a hunter(s). Hunting requires sleepless nights and long walks for days, sometimes without food or drink, away from the hunter's family, something that will eventually be compensated with meat, or the equivalent in money or cereal. The apprentice must prove to his teacher that he can endure these hardships and becomes his 'slave' or 'captive', a water-carrier, a repair-man. During this period of years of intense labour he gains his teacher's confidence in endurance. Only then is he introduced to the

rudiments and secrets of the hunt. Proof of that can be found in the texts of the songs. Still unanswered remains the question as to whether apprentices of donsonkonifola have to endure the same hardships to become hunters' musicians. Cisse's book is a primary source and a first hand presentation of the beliefs, rituals and songs of the Mande hunters.

Annik Thoyer (1995) presents four major narratives transcribed from an oral performance by Mamadu Jara of Wasulu in Bamako in the mid-1970s. In the introduction she offers a survey of hunters' associations and the role of the donsojeli, some background information on Mamadu Jara, and some discussion of the narratives presented. The four epics are: 'Sirankomi', 'Banjugu', 'Manding Mori', and 'Kambili.' The first tells us how the animals sent one of them as a beautiful woman to learn the secrets of the great hunter Sirankomi and how he escaped. In the second, a hunter tests the truthfulness of a vulture, which had sworn eternal friendship. The third tells the story of how a hunter made a bargain with a bush spirit which would eventually require his death and how his wife, whose jealousy forced him to make the bargain, saved him. And the fourth tells us how a hunter overcame the monstrous lion-man with the assistance of his wife who learned the enemy's secrets. 'Kambili' was also published in English (Bird 1974) and 'Manding Mori' appears in Cashion (1984) with a different title, 'Famori', whilst 'Manding Mori' presents a different narrative (Belcher 1999). Seydou Camara of Wasulu performed these last three epics. Nevertheless, all the narratives in Thoyer's collection have as a central theme the domestic relations of man and woman. Hunting associations are limited to men but the portrayal of women in the epics is not stereotyped or simplistic and demands careful and sensitive study.

Dosseh Joseph Coulibaly's study (1985) deals with the Maninka repertoire of Baala Guimba Diakite. He states that Maninka musicians prefer their naamunamina to be numuw or jeliw, whilst in the traditions of Segou (Bamana) and Wasulu (Bamana, Fula, etc); musicians do not have this preference (Charry 2000:69, Coulibaly 1985:6, 19). He also distinguishes between the musical vehicles between these (musical) traditions, namely the harps and tuning systems, by saying that they are indicators of ethnic identity (siya), although they praise the same heroes, such as Fakoli. Diakite's core repertoire is dealing with the odysseys of forty-five donsoba (1985:13).

Remarkable as it is, it remains a point of reference for the Maninka tradition of hunters' music.

Eric Charry (2000) devotes a chapter of twenty-five pages, in his book, to hunters' music. The book has four main chapters (on hunters' music, *jeliya*, drumming, and modern electric groups) covering the following topics: historical and performance contexts, instruments and their repertoires, tuning systems, playing techniques and styles. It is very significant because of its historical emphasis and discussion of instruments, although it lacks personal depth and reflexivity (apart from the last, seventh chapter). In the chapter on hunters' music, Charry cites all previous authors when dealing with performers and performance, the different instruments, their morphology and tunings, and their repertoires. In particular, he documents the music of the *bolon*, *simbi*, *donso ngoni*, and *kamalengoni* (his spellings), with information on tunings and some brief transcriptions. It has to be pointed out that although he goes deeper in the case of the Maninka *simbi*, commenting on the playing technique and style (very briefly), he does not do the same with the *donso ngoni*, which is treated in one small paragraph along with the *kamalengoni*. In that paragraph he cites Duran's (1995: 118) article for the tunings of both Wasulu instruments. He is aware that his 'knowledge of Maninka *simbi* music is based on much more limited resources than music discussed elsewhere in this book' (ibid 2000:63). This indicated that further research needed to be carried on.

Duran's chapter (Duran 2000; in Monson 2000) is the only other one on the music of the hunters. It is a very insightful piece that deals with the mystique of the hunters and its influence on what is known as the *wassoulou* style of music, played and sung by women in contemporary Mali. She probes the re-creation of hunters' style in *wassoulou* music and points out the significance of this phenomenon. The piece deals primarily with gender and she points out that a male singer 'only sings these songs because he isn't capable of being a hunter himself' (2000:142). Her account attests to the importance of the *kamalenkoni*'s (youth's harp) invention by Allata Brulaye Sidibe (2000:158) and reports on tunings and use-context. As she points out she has 'not however, conducted any firsthand research on hunters' music and has relied primarily on the studies of Cashion (1984), Cisse (1964, 1994), Coulibaly (1985), Bird (1972), and Thoyer (1978, 1995) as source material' (2000:178n.1).

In *Somono Bala of the Upper Niger*, David Conrad (2002) mentions hunters on numerous occasions. In discussing musical transition in the Mande, he states that he is aware of ‘at least one major variant of the Sunjata epic [by Dianka Tassej Conde 1994, that] describes Sunjata [both noble and king] playing the donso ngoni or ‘six-stringed simbi’ and Sumaoro (both blacksmith and king) [who] entertains with the ngoni’ (Ibid: 42, text in [...] is mine). In citing Charry (2000), Duran (2000) and Sekou Camara (2002), the author traces the origins, history and context of four major calabash harps among the Mande. He mentions Charles Bird’s opinion that ‘Musical accompaniment to hunters’ boasting and praising probably all started with the strumming of bows’ (ibid: 44). The bolon was used in battle to praise warriors, and is probably the oldest of the calabash harps. The dan, a pentatonic pluriarc that has associations with sorcery, is the ancestor of the donsonkoni with which it shares the same tuning, and can accompany spirit-possession ceremonies. The dan also has association with young people in various youth celebrations, such as ‘competitions, celebrating champion farmers, youth who went abroad to earn money, and brides going to the groom’s village.’ The donsonkoni and the simbi are used for praising great hunters who can also be sorcerers and healers. The kamalenkoni is a smaller, higher pitched version of the donsonkoni that is used to play ‘the kind of musical repertoire on occasions of youthful entertainment and celebration that often used to feature the dan’ (ibid: 51). In the book, there is also an interesting chapter by Sekou Camara<sup>35</sup> on the dan. The book overall is a very welcome addition to the Mande-related literature and although it does not have any descriptions of the music or the styles, it includes a great deal of information on musical instruments (mostly from Charry and Duran, but also some new information from Sekou Camara), context and appropriation of the instruments and music.

McNaughton’s study on the Mande blacksmiths (1988) is very useful. The author is dealing, as the title suggests, with knowledge, power and art of this branch of *namakalaw*. He positions blacksmiths in Mande society, talking about their ambiguous status, as men of power who transform and shape iron into objects. Apart from being expert workers of iron and wood, blacksmiths are also healers, sorcerers, rainmakers, diviners, circumcisers, sculptors, amulet makers, directors of komo (the most powerful

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<sup>35</sup> Sekou Camara was Conrad’s research assistant and son of the famous singer Seydou Camara. He has worked with many American researchers such as Charles Bird, Patrick McNaughton, David Conrad, Mary Jo Arnoldi, Sarah Brett-Smith, and Gerald Cashion.

Mande initiation association), and articulators of Mande social and spiritual space. He talks about their art and craftsmanship, their techniques, products and articulation. It is the blacksmiths that intermediate between nature and culture, that provide the tools people need to work the land with, and they are possessors of ancient and secret knowledge which can transform organic matter into “configurations” (*daliluw*) defined as ‘concise, goal-oriented clusters of information and instruction, recipes for the successful completion of an endless array of activities’ (ibid: 42). McNaughton also presents the principles of medicine and sorcery, the hierarchy of practitioners and the relative roles of blacksmiths and hunters and refers to ‘The heat of hunters, [as] truly aggressive’ (1988: 71). The study is exceptional, but there is no mention of the music of the hunters or the epic songs.

Arnoldi (1995, 2003), Brett-Smith (1994) and Frank (1998) are art historians dealing with Mande culture and art. Of the three, only Arnoldi (1995) mentions the hunters, in different sections of her book. ‘It seems highly probable that hunters were instrumental in developing these forms [the dances in masquerades of the Segou performance traditions]’ (ibid: 90). A contemporary Malian *donsonkonifola*, Sekuba Traore, sometimes imitates the walking of animals in performance (Kone 2006). This supports somewhat Arnoldi’s claim, though further research is necessary. ‘This hunter/warrior ethos, rather than one oriented specifically to agriculture or fishing, still predominates in performances even today’ (ibid: 109). She mentions that in hunters’ myths and epics, ‘hunters and warriors are completely oriented to the *fadenya* axis’ and cites Cashion giving an example of Seydou Camara’s version of *Manden Mori*. She also draws ‘parallels between the hunters’ association and the youth association [*kamalen*] in these communities’ (ibid: 164). The book is an in-depth study of the youth association puppet masquerade theatres, currently known as *Sogo bo*, *Do bo*, or *Ceko* depending on group identity, local village relationships or regional location (ibid: 25). To Arnoldi this theatre is ‘an arena of artistic action and a site for the production of knowledge’ (ibid: xiv). A distinction is made between the public masquerades, owned and produced by the youth, and other masking traditions such as the *komo*, that are controlled by men. The author also extends the concept of *fadenya* from kinship to any sort of rivalry (ibid: 156) like the one between the youth and the elders in the domain of the masquerades through challenges (ibid: 161).

Brett-Smith's (1994) book is an account of the process through which a mask is carved, and lays open a great part of the society involved. The book is concerned with the Bamana system of belief, the spirit world and the supernatural and works as a sort of guide to the intellectual system of the Bamana. Her material on female roles is entangled with issues of creativity and the spirit world (Ch.6).

Belcher (1999) gives attention to the kinds of heroes who are at the centre of African epics and the musical-poetic forms that tend to distinguish them from other kinds of narrative. The book also explores the links between epics and panegyric (praise poetry), folk tales, and historical chronicle. In one chapter, the author deals with hunters' traditions and epics. He writes that although hunting has lost all its economic importance, the social dimensions of hunters' associations have become more central. 'In Mande studies [scholars] are inclined to derive the entire epic tradition from hunters' songs. Such a view tacitly rejects the notion that epic-singing is an aristocratic entertainment that has filtered through society, or that two socially distinct traditions may be interacting' (ibid: 59). He supports this with the omnipresence of hunters' motifs in the epic of Sunjata (ibid). He also points out that epic performance varies considerably from group to group and that 'epics are not found throughout this wider region. It seems likely that the primary genre of hunters' poetry is the dirge or lament, which in some areas and under some conditions develops into narrative song or epic' (ibid: 59). He then goes on to cite all authors mentioned so far and ends the chapter with a discussion of hunters' stories ('The dividing line between the matter of hunters' epic and folktale is virtually nonexistent'[ibid: 67]), such as Siramori, Famori, Maghan Jan, and Mambi and the crocodile. I also have to point out Belcher's collection of hunters' narratives. The list includes hunters' narratives from all the Mande groups but has not yet included Cisse texts.<sup>36</sup>

Herbert's book (1993) is about iron, gender and power in African societies. She defines power as 'the means by which selected individuals are thought to gain access to and control over people and resources through their mastery of transformative processes' (ibid: 2-3). She focuses on ritual actions (for it is in ritual that beliefs about power are acted out), and prescriptive behaviours, like ironworking. She compares the hunter/warrior Sunjata with the blacksmith/sorcerer Sumanguru and states that, 'Smiths

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<sup>36</sup> The list can be found on the MANSA web site (<http://www.personal.psu.edu/staff/s/p/spb3/hunters.html>).



and musicians could not be deprived of their magical powers, but they could be redefined as specialist groups who could no longer aspire to kingship and hence posed no threat to the new Malinke dynasty established by Sunjata' (ibid: 26). Her study is very important since it sheds light on many issues regarding the rituals of transformation and procreation, taboos, the blacksmith and the forge, iron-making, pottering and pots with connections to fertility. She writes, 'The smelter or smith, then, depending on the culture, shares his exceptionality with the chief or king. He also shares it with the hunter' (ibid: 163) and devotes a chapter<sup>37</sup> to hunting and gender issues, sexual relations, sexual purity in African societies including the Mande. Herbert draws a line that links power, ideology, cosmology, categories of age (i.e. ancestors) and gender. Cosmology is expressed and reinforced by rituals of transformation. She presents a small number of case studies, irrespective of location, and examines similarities or dissimilarities, producing a generalized picture of African beliefs pulled out from rituals and objects. The book asserts that there is a single system of belief over the whole area (ibid: 16) and its findings are 'abstracted from time and place' (see also Vansina 1995).

Kassim Kone's doctoral thesis deals with Bamana verbal art and is a study of proverbs. An excellent work, still unpublished, it includes a chapter on proverbs in heroic songs, one case study being Toumani Kone's *Baru*. Kone takes us through a very detailed analysis of the text, explaining and commenting upon the 53 identified proverbs putting them in context. He also makes two points. One concerns the hunters' dancing steps and demonstrations: '[they] consist of a re-enactment of their life...of hunting dramas. Movements of the feet, the hands, the way a gun is held, the way the hunter crawls during some special performances are not simple demonstrations of the hunt, but a "co-text", a story behind the story which the bard is singing' (ibid: 178). He also mentions a poem known among the Bamana of the Beledugu as *nkala*. It is performed for a hunter hero and the lyrics talk about a big kill. The song is accompanied with a flute, but it is not a dancing song. It is usually performed first after the death of a hunter and when his body is lowered to the grave.

Traore (1999) gives several different names for the hunters' musicians: *sere*, *sora*, *nkonifo/ngonifo*. He states that the *donso* form a society within a society, that they are not organized in castes and do not constitute a caste. He writes that Baala

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<sup>37</sup> Called 'Of Forests and Furnaces, Anvils and Antelopes.'

Guimba calls these musicians *donso musoma* (female hunters) implying the complementarity between hunter and musician, which translates to a kind of sensuality. '[...] Socially, hunters and poets must maintain a symbiotic relationship, even one of total reciprocal trust...The hunter provides for the material well-being of his poet, and in turn the latter endows his patron with immortality in collective awareness' (ibid: 173). On the *naamu namine* (or *negeshiyen*, "iron scratcher"), Traore clarifies that in the Manden, he plays no instrument and most often is a *numu* or a *jeli*. The bard always performs with a student who plays a second harp and only in exceptional cases he will be a *naamu namine*. On aesthetics, Traore points out the violence, ruthlessness and imperturbability depicted in hunters' songs and epics (ibid: 179). He concludes: 'It is particularly in the context of recent social transformations that the practical effects of the ideology of the hunters' societies as a potential engine for change can be clearly shown' (ibid: 184).

Certainly we have come a long way from the first description of hunters and their amulets by Mungo Park (Park 2003: 40-44) or even before that, in the mid-fourteenth century, when Ibn Battuta reported that *jeli* was the designation for "poets" at the Malian court (Tamari in Conrad 1995:69). Today the literature on the hunters, their associations, customs and life is growing and new scholars are engaging in research on this subject. In Mali, the love, respect and interest for the hunters led to the establishment of a series of conferences in Bamako where hunters, their musicians and numerous scholars from Western Europe, Russia, and West Africa, met to present papers, perform and play music. The first conference was held in 2001 and the second in 2005. The first one produced the film "Rencontre des Chasseurs de l'Ouest Africain" and a book (Ministere de la Culture du Mali 2003). Mark Hudson reported on the second (Hudson 2005): 'If you want to track down some hunters' music, it's best to go straight to the main producer and distributor, Siriman Diallo. His narrow booth in the main market in Bamako is packed to bursting with cassettes whose covers show mainly middle-aged men in outlandish hats and leather wigs, cradling their *donsongoni* - the deep toned hunters' harp - their coarse cotton tunics bristling with leather amulets, horns and mirrors.'

'I've always loved the hunters and their music,' says the amiable Diallo. 'I saw that no one else was promoting it, and that if I didn't do it, something in our culture would die' (ibid 2005).

## **LITERATURE ON MUSIC INDUSTRY**

My theoretical framework for the thesis is grounded in how notions of continuity and change, ideology, identity and style have been dealt with by different scholars. My research examines these notions with regard to the Mande hunters of Mali as mediators and participants alike. I examined these issues with Malian peoples living in Bamako who are the audiences for hunters' music and performance. I paid particular attention to the music industry, especially music and radio producers and the role they play in shaping and shifting audiences' tastes by deciding when and what to release, play and distribute. In particular, I looked at how hunters' ideology and ethos is reflected in song and how hunters negotiate their identity in performance and song. I also investigated how audiences mirror their identity in hunters' music and ethos, in performance and song; and finally how style is affected not only by changes within the association of hunters but also through the music industry's actions.

A holistic interpretation of commercial cultural products, such as audio cassettes, should be based not so much on the analysis of 'texts' as in 'contexts' such as processes of production, dissemination, consumption and uses. On the other hand, a holistic analysis of media culture must also examine the nature of control of the mass media, the content of the product, and the effects on, and uses of, the audiences. In his discussion of the cassette revolution in India, Peter Manuel approaches the introduction of this technology from different perspectives: as a musical phenomenon, as part of a worldwide information revolution, as a mass-media occurrence, and as a part of the demonopolization of the music industry. In doing so, Manuel draws from different disciplines such as ethnomusicology, economics and media studies, but most importantly communications theory for the analysis of what he calls 'the advent of grassroots-based, decentralized, pluralistic, "democratic-participant"<sup>38</sup> micro-medium in a given region' (Manuel 1993:1). Unlike other media (cinema, television, radio), he maintains, cassettes are not monopolistic, thus allowing a potential two-way interaction.

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<sup>38</sup> Further discussion involves works by Benjamin (1968), Enzensberger (1970) and McQuail (1987).

Cassettes resist various forms of control and homogenization. Such a phenomenon needs to be seen 'in the context of a new world information order with new potentialities for decentralization, diversification, autonomy, dissent and freedom' (ibid: 3). Its ramifications are both musical and extramusical, including autonomy, freedom and national integrity.

Manuel stresses the importance of Media Theory in this kind of study since past ethnomusicological analytical frameworks, such as Merriam's music in culture as well as music and culture, Gourlay's act of performance, and Geertz's (notably through Feld) holistic 'thick description', are not sufficient. This is because, since the rise of entertainment industries, the producers and consumers of culture may well be distinct from each other with asymmetrical power relationships. Thus ethnomusicology, popular-music studies and communications literature have to address questions relating to social identity, power, freedom, authenticity, and alienation (ibid; Wallis and Malm 1984). Popular music, then, should be analyzed not solely from an aesthetic point of view, but primarily as a commodity and as a form of media content. That does not imply ignoring its aesthetic dimension, but rather involves augmenting this through attention to the ideological issues that surround a commodity, whose aesthetics are subject to the constraints and conventions of that culture. Hunters' music is not 'pop music' per se; it is rather a genre that has become popular enough among the Malians that it now has its own music industry and radio shows. In this respect I examine how and why Malian hunters' music cassettes are used, for what purpose and by whom.

The dissemination of music through cassettes poses changes in traditional processes of musical production, consumption and meaning. Music as commodity is stripped from the warmth and camaraderie of communal music-making and is returned to an alienated community. People may become dependent on cassettes for their musical needs, which makes them vulnerable to the exploitation and manipulation of the music industry to the extent that they even stop performing or attending live, social events. I examine the extent to which this applies to hunters performances and ask, is it possible for a hunter to isolate himself from his fellow hunters and rely solely on cassettes or radio shows for his musical needs? Benjamin (1968: 223-27; also in Manuel 1993: 16) noted how media dissemination separates art from the traditional ritualistic performance contexts. The decline of community values is reflected in the music itself as well as in the consumption patterns. There is an indication of financial corruption among the

hunting associations in Bamako; however, I have no evidence that this is reflected in the musical lyrics praising patrons and relations in the music industry.

Mass media and popular music are seen by the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse) as instruments of manipulation that eliminate critical consciousness, promote consumerism and disarm oppositional art. In doing so, they legitimize the status quo, promote diversion and commodity fetishism, and minimize community cohesion and participation. More recently scholars such as Stuart Hall (1973), Simon Frith (1987) and Richard Middleton (1990) see mass media and popular music as “sites of negotiation, mediation, and ‘rearticulation’ of dialectics, such as, traditional/modern, young/old, male/female, city/countryside, and regional/pan-regional” (Manuel 1993: 10). Obviously the application of such approaches to non-Western popular cultures needs some caution for two main reasons: the absence of class subcultures and the uneven and incomplete development of capitalism and modern technology.<sup>39</sup> If music is a symbol for social identity (Manuel 1993), then homogenisation or diversification can be visible both in musical style and text. I have looked into how my teacher’s repertoire and compositional choices were shaped by decisions propelled, in turn, by the tensions between homogenisation and diversification. Whilst entertainment industries try to promote their product towards a mass audience that is treated as a homogeneous entity (for economic reasons), decentralised media may speak to localised communities, minorities or special-interest groups and thus promote diversity and fragmentation (Manuel 1993).

Although cassettes have played a significant role in the expansion of the capitalist music industry, and have served to extend capital relations of production to various regions and folk genres, these are still characterised by pre-capitalist norms and values. Thus dualities of homogenisation/diversity, grassroots expression/elite indoctrination, and alienation/ authenticity are central to a study of this nature (Manuel 1993). When discussing the power and politics of the recording process, Meintjes states:

In-studio sound mixing is a process of negotiation for control over the electronic manipulations of style. If style is conceived as a performed and multilayered sign that expresses, constructs, and reproduces the sensibilities

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<sup>39</sup> Manuel is (or rather was) referring to India while I refer to Mali. Other countries like Japan for example, with their own cultural, musical, historical, technological and political-economic contexts, do not necessarily follow these rules.

of the artists (Feld 1990; Fled 1988; Urban 1985; Urban 1991, among others), then recording and mixing is a dramatized struggle over signs embodying values, identities, and aspirations. (Meintjes 2003: 9)

The studio becomes a topos for poetic innovation, for social and professional repositioning, and for empowering moves (ibid 2). She also ascertains that “Zulu-identified musicians mobilized traditional values and beliefs – such as being the embodiment of Africanness – as a means of engaging the contemporary world” (ibid 8).

Her analysis is informed by three axioms. First, while formal musical elements define a style, that style derives its meaning and affective power primarily through its associations with the socio-political positioning and social values of music participants (Keil and Feld 1994) and through the sensuous experience of those who encounter it (Seremetakis 1998; J. Taylor 1998; Feld 1996b). Second, signs (styles) can be variably interpreted and are therefore subject to manipulation in the interests of a social group. And third, expressive culture becomes a means of generating collective celebration (Meintjes 2003: 9-11).

Roderic Knight (1989) additionally notes that the development of the commercial recording industry had two effects. On the positive side, there was a dissemination of musical treasures or rarities. On the negative side and against the preservation of musical traditions, this dissemination motivated musicians to move away from traditional musics towards the new and compelling sounds of the popular styles of the West. Furthermore, whilst meaning was negotiated in performance, now the role of the producer, of mass media institutions (the music industry, radio, television, etc), and the new economic perspectives developed for artists, producers, and audiences effected the physical separation of listening/perceiving from the actual performance (Graebner 2004). According to reception theory, media content is not necessarily identical to media impact and meaning. There are several issues involved here: the audience interpretation, which can be variable and unpredictable; subtle characteristics such as style, melody, and rhythm; the recycling of melodies with new texts or meanings; limitations of the audiences on interpreting the so-called ‘actual meanings’ of the music; and the multiple readings of the music. The new medium (in this case, the gramophone) displaces performance, and to a certain degree standardizes practice across regions.

There are musical types that do not come in a form that is readily adapted to the record format. Extended forms had to be edited down in order to fit the technology of the era (78rpm, 45rpm, 33rpm, and later audio cassettes and compact discs). This frequently resulted in less instrumental improvisation and a fixation of verbal parts. The recording set-up was also an issue in the early days of the new technology, when a single recording device (microphone) was available. Recording was ultimately adapted for the release on disc; songs were cut short and arranged to fit the three-minute threshold, resulting in sometimes awkward song endings. Later, as Graebner puts it ‘the cassette recording brought music production closer to the local audience. It was inexpensive, songs could be recorded when demand arose either on the side of the artists or the public, the interval between recording and release could be reduced from weeks and months, to just a day or a few days’ (Graebner 2004: 188). This flexibility allows hunters’ music and radio producers to record and release performances very quickly, meeting audiences and patrons’ quickly evolving needs.

The crucial factors of the cassette revolution in general were the relatively low expense of cassette technology, and especially its low production costs, which enabled small cassette companies to flourish. Small labels tend to have local, specialized markets whose diverse interests they are happy to serve, unlike major recording companies which are trying to create a homogeneous market. The small, independent labels are recording and marketing regional ‘little traditions’ often ignored by the major record labels (Manuel 1991).

The expenses and technical resources of cassette producers vary considerably according to their size and target groups. Some of them may have their own studios, while others rely on rented time. Recordings can be made in modern 48-track (or more) digital studios or in the field using just one (analogue) track, and everything in between. Recording expenses may vary accordingly. Piracy is flourishing due to lack of copyright legal framework or of government tolerance (ibid). Manuel also points out something very interesting: while most cassettes are mainly for recreational listening, there are others which are more functional. An example of the latter is how housewives may play a cassette of *Satyanarayan katha* during their occasional ritual fasting instead of inviting a *pandit* to chant the story or reciting it themselves. In India, “while film music sought to homogenise its audience’s aesthetics, the cassette-based regional musics are

able to celebrate regional cultures and affirm a local sense of community” (ibid: 199). Much of this regional music fits under the category ‘traditional genres or styles’.

Cassette producers will usually only market those genres that prove profitable. Indian cassette-based popular musics have shown little respect for improvisation and lengthy songs. The goal was to squeeze as many different tunes into a single purchase. Another issue is the impact of cassette technology on live performance and the general vitality of traditional music genres. Mass media often flourish at the expense of the latter, resulting in the decline of music traditions and the decrease of communal social life in general.

Coplan states that music must be seen as a multidimensional performance complex and must be treated as a ‘discrete subsystem possessing characteristic modes of processing and communicating information... Continuity and change in performance must be regarded as aspects of overall processes of urbanisation and adaptation’ (1982: 113). Adaptation is a central concept in the analysis of urban cultural transformation and in the dynamics of long-term social processes. The process of urban social change involves a complex articulation between kinship, ethnic-regional, residential and class ties in order to determine the people’s cultural behaviour.

Musical composition involves the reinterpretation of new elements within existing cultural models, and the reshaping of the latter to facilitate adaptation to changing situations. Coplan goes on to point out how contemporary rural musical traditions must not be regarded as identical to those of the distant or recent past. This is due to the general notion of syncretism, where we can detect a complex blending of traditions in adaptation to urban life. This is, in fact, common among popular musicians who function as cultural brokers. These are professional musicians, a notion that is new to many African societies. Nevertheless, African performers continue to address themselves as promoters of a shared community, which they help to create.

According to Coplan, ‘an integrated approach to stylistic analysis should relate the function, structure, meaning and value of music to patterns of individual and collective experience as a groundwork for a general theory of performance process’ (ibid: 126). Human action is grounded in historical conditions, which include social and cultural structures such as musical traditions. These structures are perpetuated and transformed through the social action they facilitate. Different structures, including music, shape and are shaped by other structures in specific ways,



which allow them to be isolated for analysis. Socially constructed power relations, values, meanings and rules for action condition structures such as performance.

Having examined the texts that provide the contexts of Mande hunters' musical and extramusical life, I move on to show how particularly changing contexts as media and music industry, and urbanisation become driving forces within which musical activities take shape. Therefore, I begin my discussion with such activities and consider hunters' master musicians and their apprentices.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MASTERS AND APPRENTICES

Learning has to do with the development of our practices and our ability to negotiate meaning. It is not just the acquisition of memories, habits, and skills, but the formation of an identity. Our experience and our membership inform each other, pull each other and transform each other. (Wenger 1998: 96)

In this chapter, I consider hunters' brotherhoods and examine hunters' musicians, their ensembles and educational system. I discuss master musicians and their lineages through apprenticeship; rivalry between master musicians; and the structure of the hunters' music ensemble. I then discuss aspects of hunters' apprenticeship. I take the reader through the process of initiation in hunters' societies and discuss the importance and role of the master hunter in the learning process of young initiates. I then argue that experience is fundamental in the transmission of knowledge in this specific system of apprenticeship, and consider the different subjects of training taught and learned by hunters' musicians. I then show how emotions are involved in the learning process.

#### **Donsonkonifola: MUSICIAN ON A MISSION**

A hunters' master musician is generally called donsonkonifola or nkonifola in southern and central Mali whilst in the Mande heartland he is known as sora or sere. Many scholars such as Bird (1971, 1972), Camara (1976), Cisse (1994:64-65), Thoyer (1995), Charry (2000), Camara (2005: 68), McNaughton (2008: 75) and Jansen (2008: 266) refer to hunters' musicians as donsojeli, a term contested by Cashion (1984: 284) and Strawn (2011: 204). The latter points out that, 'Wasulu hunters' musicians tend to distance themselves from *jamakalaw*', the social group of artisans of which the *jeliw* or griots are a part and who are the designated, hereditary praise singers for the *horonw* or nobles. Hunters' musicians, like hunters, may come from different strata of the Mande social structure and enter the association voluntarily where everyone treats each other equally as brothers according to the hunters' law. *Jeliw*, just like everyone, can become

hunters and praise singers although the handful I met, are not donsonkonifolaw. Strawn gives a final difference between the two groups of musicians: while the donsonkonifola are obliged to perform for a hunter, even if there is dispute between them, the jeliw may refuse and prolong the dispute as a result. In the case of donsonkonifola and the donso this dispute would most likely be resolved in performance.

My consultants never used the terms donsojeli, sora, or sere when referring to themselves or their colleagues. Instead, they would either use donsonkonifola and nkonifola or terms such as nkonifo, folikela, folila or kɔɔ all specific to Wasulu hunters' musicians. Sekou Camara made another interesting point regarding this term in relation to a master musician:

He has a beautiful voice and he plays beautifully the nkoni, no doubt about that but, he is not a donsonkonifola yet. He hopefully will be one day – he is still very young and learning. A true donsonkonifola is most of all a moraliser. Donkili man di, kɔɔ ka di! (Singing is not sweet, what lies beneath is!) It is the meaning of the words that matters. He is not pushing hunters to the extremes and is not commenting on their behaviour. He still needs to learn that. He is not yet a sora or ɲara. He is a fantastic donsojeli, a musician with a great voice and musical ability but not a master of the words and a public moraliser.

To Sekouba, a pleasing and nice sounding hunters' musician is simply like a griot who seeks to please his patron in order to extract material goods. A real donsonkonifola has a different job to do: to push the hunter to extremes, to make him surpass his own abilities in order to excel in the hunt and provide meat for the musician and by implication to his own family, compound, village, community.

A nkonifola must also serve a hunter by singing his skills and achievements in killing big and dangerous beasts in the bush. In doing so, a hunters' musician must seek knowledge in the bush. He needs to familiarise himself with the forest, the hunting ground and the secrets of survival: how to orientate, find drinking water, seek food, skin, chop and cook the game, learn the science of the trees and perform divination. He needs to become an experienced dweller of the bush. He must also get to know the

hunters for whom he will perform so he can speak the truth about them. Donsonkoni is all about truth. In a world of lies and deception, the bush provides the ground for individuals to seek and accept the hunters' law or *sariya*. Because of the extraordinary things that are happening in the bush, humbleness and truthfulness are embraced and lies are condemned. Although, as we shall see there are tensions between the ideology of best moral practice and the moral dilemmas that hunters face in rivalry and competition in a society where competition informs gain in status as well as on socio-economic dealings and practices. The best way for a *nkonifola* to achieve this status of knowledge and performance is to follow the hunters into the bush.

Together, hunters and bards enter the world of uncertainty, darkness, magic and supernatural and work with each other to overcome these elements. The hunters hunt and the bards do the housekeeping at the camp site: gather fire wood, light a fire, prepare the meal. In symbolic relationship, they do all things that a wife would do in a household. The *donsonkonifola* therefore weds the hunter and the ideal of *donsoya*, the art of hunters. He serves the hunter as a wife and will be referred to as such. Musicians take pride in that portrayal. On many occasions when my fellow apprentices and teacher had to share a camping site with hunters, we always insisted that we sleep separately from them. Namani would say to the hunters "Go sleep somewhere else; if we sleep together, who is going to prepare the meal?" In a joking manner we stated the obvious: if husband and wife lie together in bed, they will lose track of time. He will not go hunting and she will have no meat to cook.<sup>40</sup>

A *nkoni* player must humble himself before a hunter regardless of his own experience and knowledge; just like a wife would do before her husband. He must also behave as his *kalanden* (student), showing respect. Strawn (2011: 209) underlines the fact that, 'Hunters are the first masters' and thereby gives one more reason for the humbleness of *nkonifolaw*: a *karamɔɔ* (master/teacher) inculcates fear in others. That may drive people away. It is to the musician's benefit to be approachable, however, as one of his aims is to bring people together. Through humility, hunters' musicians promote social cohesion (ibid: 210). This has been the case for many years now. Solo

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<sup>40</sup> Gender is an important issue in the study of Mande hunters in general but also specifically in relation to *donsonkonifolaw*. Unfortunately, the limited space in this thesis does not permit any extended elaboration on the gender roles between hunters and their musicians.

Konate belongs to the youngest *sanga* or generation of master hunters' musicians that trace their art back to the early *karamogow* of the 1940s.

## **Sanga: GENERATIONS OF MUSICIANSHIP**

According to oral accounts, one of the earliest *donsonkonifola* of the twentieth century was Nkonifo Burama Diakite who abandoned the *dan*, a five-string calabash pluriarch and ancestor of the *donsonkoni* (Charry 2000, Camara 2002), in the 1940s to pick up the hunters' harp. He is considered among the best musicians in the Wasulu hunters' musical style and an inspiration to all musicians that followed. Other contemporaries include Sadie Diakite, also from the Wasulu area and Batoma Sanogo from the Segou region, who is renowned for his epic stories cherished even today by many listeners through three cassettes that have been released by the music label Siriman Diallo in Bamako. Burama and Sadie also made recordings for the French colonial administration. Burama's recordings are said to be back in France, while some of Sadie's are still in the archives of ORTM in Bamako and have been released through Siriman's label.

The next generation of *nkonifolaw* include some of the pioneers of the style both in terms of innovation and popularization of this music. Arne Doumbia, Bu Bilen Kone, Madu 'Kuruni' Diarra from Badjalan in Bamako, Tenkelen Bembe, Jimbalaya Yaya Sangare, Toumani Kone from Wasulu and Seydou Camara from Kabaya on the borders with Guinea are some of them. 'Kuruni' was very popular among the hunters of Bamako; Jimbalaya was originally a violin (*soku*) player; Toumani was a leper and singer but not a *nkoni* player; and Seydou was a former soldier, sorcerer, *komo* priest *jembe* player and hunter who abandoned the *dan* and started playing the *donsonkoni*. He became very popular in the 1950s, was recorded by the French and then Mali Radio after independence in the 1960s, fell out of hunters' favour and retreated to become one of the most prolific consultants for Western researchers, such as Charles Bird, Gerald Cashion, Patrick McNaughton and David Conrad. Toumani Kone became the most popular hunters' singer and, to this day, is the most well known of all. He recorded extensively for the National Radio and his recordings were released by Siriman's label as cassettes and lately have been re-released in CD format. He died, however, in poverty after falling out of the hunters' favour.

The following generation are the old guard of hunters' music in present day Mali. Masters like Bala Guimba Diakite and Satigi Doumbia are retired but others such as Yoro Sidibe, Sambouni Diakite, Sibiri Samake and Jinaden Zoumana Kanta are still performing. Bala Guimba is regarded as one of the most knowledgeable *simbifola* of the Manden heartland and holder of secret and occult lore. Guimba became a consultant of many African, French and German scholars. His cassettes are cherished by connoisseurs of Maninka *simbi* music and his apprentices carry on his distinctive style in the Mande plateau. Sambouni makes just a few appearances here and there as his age does not permit for more (he is older than Yoro Sidibe who is now in his mid 70s). Jinaden has migrated to Gambia and offers his services to the hunters there. He is known for his magic powers and his tricks, though the style he continues to play is the Bamana *donsonkoni*. Sibiri was educated as a musician at the Institute National des Arts and is a well-recorded musician with international releases in France and the United States. Yoro is currently the chief of the hunters' musicians in the National Federation in Mali, and is considered to be the eldest, wisest and most knowledgeable of all. He is teacher and master of many in the last generation of hunters. Whilst all of these *nkonifolaw* have recorded for the National Radio and other independent producers, it is Yoro who excels both in number of recordings and performances. He has released dozens of cassettes in West African markets and is in heavy demand in Mali as a performer (Strawn 2011: 203).

The last generation of hunters' musicians include students of the previous generation. Yoro's 'school' or 'academy' prevails with a number of very popular *donsonkoni* players: Sekoubani Traore from Kati, Toba Seydou Traore from Wasulu, Solo Konate and Abdoulaye Traore from Bamako. All these *nkonifolaw* carry the sound of Yoro Sidibe<sup>41</sup>. Sekoubani is by far the most popular of them all, and also the most controversial. He has been criticised for incorporating *kamalen nkoni* rhythms into the *donsonkoni* repertoire and, as a result, some very conservative hunters and musicians say that he is not a true *nkonifola*. He is popular outside Mali and travels to France to perform for the public, offering consultations to individuals as a diviner and sorcerer. Toba Seydou and Abdoulaye sound very much like Yoro; not just in their *nkoni* playing but also in the way that they sing. Solo, on the other hand, has a unique nasal quality in

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<sup>41</sup> Here I refer to the preference for timbre or tone color, bass quality, rhythms and riffs, vocal melodies and stock phrases of song text (expressions, proverbs and language).

his voice and virtuosity on the harp. His sound is characteristic and immediately recognisable. Part of this generation is Madu Sangare, the son of Jimbalaya Yaya who is considerably older than the rest and second in command in the hunters' musicians branch of the National Federation association of hunters. When Yoro decides to retire, Madu will become the chief of donsonkonifolaw.

There are hundreds of other master musicians all over the country. Some of them remain in the countryside, others have moved to Bamako to seek fame and money. The option of praising the somaw has generated a wave of new musicians who are after somaw patronage and their many material benefits including cash and also gifts such as land, domestic animals and cars. Madu Sangare has been criticised for being responsible for this movement and starting this kind of praise singing. Young apprentices want to model themselves after him but many master musicians do not approve. Solo, along with Yoro's other students, believe that this practice has nothing to do with donsoya. They will perform for specially gifted somaw like Moustapha Diallo but not for any other 'charlatan who claims to have special divine and healing powers.' Nevertheless, the popularity of somaw is so great among Malians that, by implication, hunters' music is performed and heard in their public gatherings and séances.

### **Fadenya: RIVALRY AMONG MUSICIANS**

There is a great deal of rivalry between the nkoni players. Just like the rivalry between brothers from different mothers (*fadenya*), it can be good or bad, so to speak, generating either productive or aggressive and envious competition. Rivalry is well hidden and rarely surfaces or materialises in disputes. In a sense, *nkonifolaw* from different 'schools' might be antagonistic and competitive, drawing parallels from the behaviour within traditional Mande family among one husband and his multiple wives with their children. An arguable interpretation would be that the wives represent the different *donsonkonifolaw*, each with their own 'school'. Their children (students) would then be the apprentices of each 'school'. They have to report, observe and respect the husband, who represents the hunters and their association. This structure resonates with the name and hierarchy of the harps in the ensemble: the lead nkoni played by the master is called *nkoniba* (mother-harp) and the accompanying one played by the apprentice is called *nkoniden* (child-harp). Just as the wives are always demanding of

their husbands, and in constant competition and rivalry, the students learn to be like them and confront their rivalries from different mothers. In chapter three, I have discussed the concept of *kalandenya* as a never ending relationship among hunters: once a student of a master, always a student of this master. *Donsonkoni* apprentices from different ‘schools’ are rivals as they hold some distinctive elements of knowledge through their training with different masters. While much of their knowledge overlaps, it is kept secret, and there is always suspicion about who knows what and who is more powerful than the other.

This uncertainty is most evident in performance when, many *donsonkonifolaw* from different ‘schools’ have to play and sing at the same event. Every time I witnessed this, offerings were made; spells were cast on other musicians; herbs were burned; the harps were smoked; lotions were applied to the body; and organic drinks were consumed. The musician’s zenith is to excel in performance, to outdo the other musicians and to leave an impeccable and memorable impression.

Rivalry between the members of the same ‘school’ is considered to be honourable competition. It should not generate bad spells or any other dark magic between fellow apprentices (graduates and/or undergraduates); rather there is always an exchange of ideas and experiences in a communally shared way. Yet, there are exceptions to this rule: the most notable antagonism was that of Yoro Sidibe and his ‘former’ student Sekoubani Traore. The clash between them is well known but no one will talk about it freely. The two masters keep avoiding each other and never perform together at the same event. This rivalry has left the other members of Yoro’s ‘school’ somewhere in the middle. Many take Yoro’s side and keep their distance from Sekoubani, others like Solo perform with him in events but try to be as neutral as possible. Along with humility, being moderate is a virtue for both hunters and the *nkonifolaw*. As Solo told me, “I will only hurt myself if I go against them!”

Solo was clear that there was no rivalry, *fadenya*, between his apprentices as they had been disciplined into Yoro’s system. The eldest apprentice, Lansine, played a big part in deciding who would join the group. Solo would send the candidate to Lansine for a chat and Lansine would report back to Solo after careful analysis of the character and ethos of the newcomer. If the report was negative, Solo would not accept



the newcomer and order Lansine to get rid of him. However, if it was positive then they would all welcome him to the team.

Solo also found time to sit down with his students and talk to them. He advised them how to behave to each other just like he did with his children. He did his best to “bring peace between them.” He told the younger ones to respect and not to offend the older students. He explained that if an older student decided that a younger student had to leave the team, he would. He made it clear that this is how things work. So the younger knew his place in the hierarchy and behaved accordingly. The teacher, this way, contributed to the building of his students’ moral character and facilitated the development of male bonding relations.

Adama explained that there were no problems between the students and that their relationship was ideal. There were no misunderstandings or bad rows, “There is only peace.” In case of a problem, a quarrel or an argument, apprentices consulted the senior student, Lansine. He was usually the one who resolved such arguments and remedied to this crisis. All students joked and laughed a lot with each other and enjoyed themselves as part of their ‘community of practice’ but when it came to work, no joke was tolerated. As Adama stated, “We are very serious when we work but afterwards, we play and joke until it is time we separate.” Solo’s apprentices had established both musical practice and social etiquette by participating in their master’s ensemble. These are dispositions that help apprentices to integrate with their colleagues and the senior hunters of the brotherhood, but also to strengthen their position in the wider society within which they also have to function.

It is thus very important to maintain good relationships between musicians, as well as between musicians and hunters, and among hunters. There is always pressure on these relationships, as while the demand for performers is great and there are “way too many” musicians. Participating, leaving a good impression and having exceptional public relations are crucial for the survival of an nkonifola and his family, especially in the urban context of Bamako. Every musician tries to get as many gigs as possible and spends hours on the phone everyday talking to hunters and radio presenters who might organise an event in the near future. Some musicians work more than others because of their reputation, which are based on a combination of lineage attributions, performance abilities, communication skills and ability to maintain contacts.

## MUSICIANS AND SUBSTANCES

Within a stressful programme and their endurance of all-night performances, hunters' musicians have been elevated to the status of superhuman beings. From the data I have collected and my observations and interviews, I have found that ordinary people think of them as spokesmen of a golden era, prophets, and men who see the future (*l'avenir*) or 'things to come' with powers to manipulate and change it. To their minds, nkonifolaw are tireless, courageous, persistent and poignant *ubermensch* whose haunting performances require magic, power and knowledge that counterbalance the powers of wicked hunters and potentially demonic life forces like *ɲama*. It is not surprising that a few, but nonetheless alarming, number of Malians in Bamako attribute this stamina of the nkonifolaw to modern drugs.

There is a lot of drug trafficking in Bamako and one can easily find and buy illegal drugs that range from cannabis to heroin, from amphetamines to barbiturates. Nkonifolaw like hunters enjoy drinking alcohol, especially bottled beer and wine, and the locally made beer called *nya dolo*. Both are reluctant to drink in public and retire in private spaces to share a cup or a bottle of their favourite beverage. Certain musicians though indulge in modern drugs and mix them with alcohol. The result spans from comic to sad. Ensembles that can barely walk in sync, chorus singers out of tune and lead singers twisting their tongues as they try to synthesise phrases and praises. It is a sign of the times, a complex outcome of the quick modernisation of the Malian capital, the flow of economic and war immigrants and new opportunities, as my consultants repeatedly stated. Entrepreneurs and businessmen, politicians thirsty for power and money (*argeant* or *wari*), have been spending fortunes in divination séances and consultations provided by *somaw*. Some of this capital eventually ends up with hunters' musicians, a number of whom use it to buy and use drugs.

## THE HUNTERS' MUSIC ENSEMBLES

Master musicians perform with their ensembles as I discuss in chapter five. Here I would like to focus on the structure of hunters' music ensemble. In the past it was common for the master musicians to perform on their own or in the accompaniment of a single *karijan* player. In the absence of apprentices, the nkonifola would travel and perform with his wife, or fiancée in that role. Nkonifo Burama, Sadie Diakite, Seydou

Camara, Madu 'Kuruni' Diarra and Solo Konate have all performed with their partners on the *karijan*. In recent times, though, this practice has changed due to the popularity of this music especially in the urban areas and the abundance of apprentices around the master musicians. A typical ensemble today consists of the lead singer and lead *nkoni* player (*nkoniba*), the senior apprentice accompanying his master on the rhythm *nkoni* (*nkoniden*), two junior apprentices on the iron scraper (*karijan*) and a *kutsuba* player. If the master has more students on site, they may alternate in all the accompanying instruments. The rule is that the accompanying *nkonifola* (*nkonidenfola*) is in form and focused because he is the one who will be keeping the pace and providing the rhythm or melodic pattern at all times.

As Solo explained during our meetings and rehearsals, the *nkonidenfola* always sticks to the original rhythm/riff while the master may improvise different licks around it. He may also stop playing to focus on singing, challenging or praising the hunter in performance. It is left to the student to 'do all the hard work' and provide the sonic and rhythmic foundation for the song. Let us move now to these attributes of ensemble performance practice by examining how these have evolved, changing and shaping the repertoire of Wasulu hunter's music.

### **Kalandenya: APPRENTICESHIP**

Apprenticeship has been widely considered by different authors (Ingold 2000; Marchant 2009a; McNaughton 1988, 2008; Stoller and Olkes 1987; Wacquant 2004). Here I draw on two to frame the discussion about the Mande hunters' musicians and their apprentices. I argue that these apprentices acquire vital knowledge through experience and action as they interact and perceive the environment they live in. In doing so they perform in public events and hunters' ceremonies adopting a role very much based in socio-cultural symbolism that springs from the hunters' cosmology and worldview. The relationship of apprenticeship embodies both continuity and connection to master's lineage, and change and dynamism, which will be discussed in later chapters.

Trevor Marchand discusses apprenticeship amongst craftsmen and masons in Yemen, Mali and more recently woodcarvers in England. After undertaking apprenticeship in the south Arabian city of San'a as a PhD student, he moved to the Malian city of Djenne to be trained as a mason many years later. The former research included his interests in the nature of training and the progression of neophytes, and

culminated in his *Minaret Building and Apprenticeship in Yemen* (2001). The latter, which looked upon apprenticeship and traditional building-craft knowledge, resulted in his ethnography *The Masons of Djenne* (2009). In this book Marchand takes ‘a broad and encompassing perspective of what constitutes knowledge’ (2009:9). He employed an apprentice-style method, labouring and assisting the masons in order to gain firsthand experience of their art and craft.

Marchand learned how change in consumer tastes for building material and living space shapes the masons practices; he learned how political and economic factors caused these changes; and he established a firm and lasting relationship with the individuals involved in these professional building associations, becoming part of their social networks, exploring their training regimes and experiencing their changing fortunes. As a mason’s apprentice he, too, had to pay for the acquisition of knowledge by supplying free labour, gifts of money, kola nuts and nutriment but he was not cognizant of the secret knowledge of the master masons, that an apprentice receives after working closely with his master over a long period of many years. The spells for protection and good fortune are reserved only for the committed ones.

His role as an apprentice made him aware of ‘the sensible and psychological phenomena that affect work performance, including the extreme climate and conditions of the Sahel; the sheer physical strain of labour; well-being and illness; hunger and appetite; the tedium of endless mechanical tasks; and the euphoria when a job is done’ (ibid: 9). Marchand arrives at a very interesting conclusion that may be applied to my own research among the Mande hunters’ musicians: ‘[their] practices are not only responding to and creating a physical environment, but, more important, they are *making* their own spaces and places of learning’ (ibid: 13).

For hunters and *donsonkonifolaw*, their environment is not just physical, informed by the ecology of the earth but it is also conceptual, spiritual and vital as they move from hunting to music making, the worshipping of fetishes, the acquisition of the science of the trees and divination. They start to shape performances and ceremonial spaces as well as social, political and economic networks through discourse and practice. As they move from neophytes to masters through apprenticeship, they accumulate secret knowledge that helps them make the transition from common men to deeply knowledgeable, respected and feared hunters. That marks the ambiguity of hunters. Although the hunters’ brotherhood is a secret society, membership is known.

However, it is the knowledge that is secret, concealed and kept away from non-initiates. The hunters' society is a system of managing such secret knowledge. As knowledge is power, hunters are potentially powerful and dangerous. Ordinary people, then, respect hunters for their knowledge and skills but also fear their power and the possibility to do harm.

The path is difficult and uncertain. Marchand reveals that the original term for apprentice in Djene-Chiini is *maale-banya*, literally meaning 'the slave of the master' (ibid: 46). The term has been replaced though with a less violent one, *dyente-idye* or learn-a-trade-child, which is closer to the Bamanankan word for apprentice, *kalanden*, literally learn-child. The author explains that a mason would take his son to the building site at the age of seven and the training commences with minor tasks. As the boy gets older, responsibilities are expected to increase and at the age of ten, the child will be assigned more complex tasks. Serious apprenticeship, though, will not begin before the age of fifteen or sixteen when the young man is physically ready to handle the tools and hard work but also when 'he is considered to have acquired a disciplined focus on his tasks and heeds instructions' (ibid: 93). The master withholds the apprentice's salary and the student is expected to labour in exchange for learning the art.

Patrick McNaughton is a scholar who became an apprentice to a Mande blacksmith for his fieldwork and published his account under the title *The Mande Blacksmiths: Knowledge, Power and Art in West Africa* (1988). One of his key informants was the renowned blacksmith-sorcerer and hunters' bard, Seydou Camara, as well as his son, Sekouba Camara. McNaughton uses information passed to him by Seydou in his most recent book *A Bird Dance Near Saturday City* (2008). The theme of the book is about a masquerade performance witnessed by the author in 1978. He revisits that night through his field notes and old photographs in order to understand the power of individuals in African art, and what they suggest about society and the power of aesthetics as a cultural phenomenon. The study reveals the ways human beings collaborate to create the unforgettable experience of an exceptional masquerade performance: *Konɔ* by Sidi Ballo.

The author throughout the text refers to Seydou Camara and hunters' practices. 'The man of the house and the man of the bush are not the same'<sup>42</sup> (Bird, Koita and

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<sup>42</sup> This is a song line from *Kambili*, a hunter's epic story, performed by Seydou Camara.

Soumaouro 1974: line 232, also in McNaughton 2008:75). ‘So singers are birds, and birds inspire an array of ideas about knowledge, power, prowess, and artful expertise. Prowess in frames of action, such as state-building or people-protecting earns individuals the title *ɲana*, “hero.” The counterpart of prowess, artful expertise, in the frame of action called performance, earns bards an equivalent title, *ɲara*, and earns all great performers the honoured distinction of possessing *kenɛya*, virtuosity. In this way very good singers bear resemblance to birds, both in their beauty and in their clout’ (ibid: 249). It is said that birds taught humans how to sing and today great singers, not just hunters’ bards are praised as birds. McNaughton underlines the idea that beauty incorporates content so a song is not just about the sound but also its meaning. Birds are also linked to knowledge and prowess, and beauty to *ɲama*, the vital force, both energising and dangerous, behind all matter. Singing birds occupy a central position in the Mande systems of thought (ibid: 245).

Seydou Camara described himself as a bird numerous times in his songs but he is not the only one. One of the first songs I learned to sing with my teacher and peers was *Si ɲɛna kɔnɔni*:

**Lead Singer:** *Si ɲɛna kɔnɔni kasi kan.*

**Chorus:** *Su mana ko dugu se bɛ jɛ.*

**Lead Singer:** *Mɛn ɲɛna kɔnɔni kasi kan. Su mana dugu se bɛ jɛ.*

The little night-vision bird is coming to sing for you. The singer is coming to sing for you. He will sing all night until the morning light falls on the village.<sup>43</sup>

Darkness and obscurity, what the Bamana call *dibi*, is an important concept in Mande thought and action. It is the opposite of *jɛya*, clearness, brightness, whiteness. It is the outcome of sorcery and *ɲama*. It is mysterious, poetic and terrifying. It is likened to the wilderness, the forest and the night. It is the world the supernatural, or the invisible inhabits, and a ‘place of action and consequences’ (ibid: 176). *Dibi* is also ignorance but with learning and accumulating knowledge, what is obscure becomes clear. Having established the importance of knowledge and the need to escape ignorance, I move on to discuss the process of initiation to hunters’ secret society or brotherhood and the apprenticeship under a master musician; who can become an apprentice and how this can be pursued.

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<sup>43</sup> The song is translated and analyzed in Chapter Three: Hunters Music.

## THE PROCESS OF INITIATION

Solomane Konate, at the age of approximately thirty-five, is an accomplished *donsonkonifola*, a hunters' musician and singer. He is also an initiated hunter, diviner and healer with a wide range of knowledge regarding the science of the plants. His deceased father was Numori Konate and his mother, with whom he used to live during my fieldwork, was Klenze Fane (d. 2012). He is married to Kenja 'Tenen' Diarra and has seven children. His native village is called Numubugu and is situated five kilometres south of Negela in the broader region of Beledugu. Solo claims to follow an old family custom in music-making. His great-grand father was a hunters' musician. Solo never met him but believes that this music had been in his family for him to pick up. He is what Marchand (personal communication 2011) calls a 'vocational migrant', a person who moves between jobs: coming to a new profession with a background from another profession.

Solo did not play the harp before his apprenticeship with master hunter musician, Yoro Sidibe. In fact, he dropped out of school at an early stage to become a tailor. He soon abandoned tailoring to become a carpenter for about a year before he turned to a different trade, the making of canoes, *cɛncɛnbɔkɔlun*, where he stayed for five years. While he was doing this job, he became an apprentice of Yoro Sidibe. During the day, Solo would work as a canoe carver and in the evenings he would go to Yoro's house to learn how to play the harp. He became so good at it that he finally graduated from Yoro's 'academy' and was 'freed' as a master musician himself. His apprenticeship lasted ten whole years until his master told him 'I want to set you free, to allow you to do as it pleases you now.' In 1998 he decided to quit his day-job and devote himself to music-making.

To become a hunter's apprentice, one has to enter the *donsotɔn*, the brotherhood of the hunters. He has to be initiated at the *dankun* (crossroads), the hunters' shrine at the edge of the town, otherwise it is impossible for his master to teach him anything regarding the esoteric power, magic spells, incantations and herbal remedies that he possesses. With the musicians it is somehow a bit different. To be a musician's apprentice one does not need to enter the association immediately. He may start practising the *donsonkoni* (hunters' harp) and play the *nɛgɛ* (iron scraper) in public

events with the master's ensemble but he has no right to participate in hunters' sacred ceremonies such as the *bɔlobɔ* or the *kunsi*. He cannot attend nor be taught about these ceremonies. There are also some secret sites like the shrine of the *dankun* to which the non-initiate is not allowed to go to. This is fairly regional though. I have seen children play by the *dankun* in Kabaya, Wasulu. The shrine is at the outskirts of the town, in plain view and people pass by it everyday.

The non-initiated music apprentice has to pay the price of the initiation rooster in order to become initiated and fully participate, learn about and play at all hunters' ceremonies. He then may learn what rhythms, songs, dances, and words can be performed on each occasion from his master. So, unless the apprentice is initiated at the hunters' shrine, the *dankun*, his teacher cannot teach him all that he knows, "He cannot tell him many of these things because these are the secrets of the hunters." Solo's nephew was such a case. He was young at the time of my fieldwork, could play the harp and the *nege*, could dance very well and fast, and could even sing some songs but was not initiated at the *dankun*. As a result, during a ceremony in Kangaba, the capital and cultural centre of the Mande heartland, Southwest of Bamako, he stayed behind, in town, and waited for the hunters to finish the ceremony so he could join us for the rest of the day and celebrations.

Initiation is the first true step in the process of learning the *nkoni* (short for *donsankoni*). The teacher will ask the apprentice to bring a rooster for his initiation ceremony<sup>44</sup>. After the initiation, the teacher will point out to the apprentice that all the musicians and apprentices before him are his teachers and all the students who follow him are his students. He must respect his teachers as he respects his personal teacher. He should also respect his equals in seniority, play and accompany them in performances and not fight or harm them under any circumstances. Between hunters, respect is the key element of union, an obligation. The apprentices that follow him in seniority should be respected as well, unless they are disrespectful and offend him.

For the Mande of Mali, respect, *bonya*, is a fundamental quality in their sociality. Younger members of the family and by extension of society must respect their

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<sup>44</sup> During my fieldwork, I was initiated twice at the *dankun*. The first time was in Bamako by Solo and another hunter who performed the ceremonial protocol and made the offerings and read the signs. I was asked not to describe the ceremony to non-initiates. The second time, in Kabaya, Wasulu, the hunters who initiated me let me take photos, film and record the initiation ceremony but suggested that I be laconic with my description. Hence, I stopped here hoping that in the future I would have a clearer idea of what to publish and what not on the matter.



elders, students must show respect to their teachers and so on. **Bonya** is also used as a verb: to augment, or to increase; as well as a noun: importance, abundance, intensity, respect, honour; and gift or present. For the Bamana and the Maninka, **bonya** is cognitive and can be taught to children by their parents (in the wider sense of the term) and teachers. Respect makes people ‘increase’, become ‘better’, ‘gifted’ and ‘important.’ Hunters use the term frequently to criticise other people. To them, respect is a given; all hunters are respectful. They have learned how to be so as apprentices.

The new initiate is also advised to be faithful to his wife and to be respectful to the spouses of other hunters. Sexual relations with other hunters’ wives are forbidden. The hunters’ code, as described by Cashion (1984), is long and is taught over a period of many years. On the day of my initiation in Bamako, Solo and Cemogo Doumbia (the chief of Hunters in Djikoroni) pointed out the above rules to a fellow apprentice and myself. The initiation rooster can be sacrificed anytime during the first, second or even third year of the apprenticeship. It really depends on the financial ability of the apprentice. He may not be able to afford this expense immediately after his acceptance by the teacher. The price for such a bird is usually 3,000 to 4,000 FCFA (or £4-5) and equivalent to a day’s food for a family of 20 people.<sup>45</sup>

## **HOW ONE BECOMES AN APPRENTICE**

Hunter’s apprenticeship is utterly voluntary. The student-to-be chooses to learn the art of the donsonkoni and approaches a master musician to ask if he would accept him as an apprentice. The first thing the teacher does is to ask the young man if he has informed his parents about his decision to become a harp player. If the answer is positive then he goes to the parents’ house to cross-examine the boy’s answer. He asks the parents if they are aware of their child’s decision and if they agree; then he accepts him as his apprentice. If they do not agree he informs the boy that unless he persuades his parents otherwise, he will not be able to teach him the nkoni and that he needs to “give up his dream.” A teacher does not choose his apprentices. It is only apprentices who choose their teacher.

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<sup>45</sup> FCFA stands for Franc Communauté Financière Africaine, the currency in Mali and other West African countries. One pound sterling corresponds to 781 FCFA.



Fig. 3: Abdoulaye Konate, one of Solo's sons, holding his father's donsokoni. He frequently expressed an interest in becoming a hunters' musician (May 2010).

Consulting the sand, doing sand divination or *latru* before accepting a new apprentice is mandatory.<sup>46</sup> A master cannot be everywhere or know everything and he needs to be sure that the person who is about to become his apprentice and follower for the next few years has high moral values and behaves well. An apprentice is never accepted before a master is well acquainted with who he is and finds out by any means if he is a good person or a bad one. He must not be a thief or a playboy either. It is a great shame if people come to the master's house after a performance to ask for stolen goods or to inform the master that one of his apprentices has run away with a married woman.<sup>47</sup> It is not the teacher who is perceived to have done wrong, but his reputation is at stake. It is his fault for not knowing who his apprentices really are. So doing the *latru* is imperative in order to decide if an apprentice will bring "light or darkness, glory or shame" to the master.

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<sup>46</sup> There are many types of divination exercised in Mali among the Mande people. Traore (2007) has written extensively about the most popular one, the sand divination called *latru*.

<sup>47</sup> In performances, very few people have access to the host's compound; usually close friends of the family, relatives and the musicians. Hence, it is fairly easy for the host to find out who were responsible for such acts.

## **THE NUMBER OF APPRENTICES**

The number of apprentices that a master has, varies from time to time in his career and depends on the master's reputation as a musician and teacher. The more popular he becomes, the more applications he will receive from prospective students. Students can be helpful but are a huge responsibility for a teacher, who becomes their mentor and father figure for many years. Ideally, Solo would have liked to have ten apprentices but he did not have the means to support them. He preferred to have them stay in his house but he was still building extra rooms to accommodate students. He justified this number by saying that there are times when a student may be sick or unable to travel for a ceremony or a concert and he needs to have enough students to replace him. He wanted his ensemble to be complete: at least another harp player and two *nege* players. In long events, students would get very tired and it was a good idea to have replacements. At the time of my fieldwork Solo had seven apprentices but he did not have a big enough car for them all. As a result, he was obliged to leave one or two behind when touring the countryside.

I was told that a famous teacher cannot limit himself to a certain number of students. He cannot refuse someone by saying that the number of his apprentices is complete. With time, students will come and go. The oldest will be released and the one who follows him in the hierarchy will replace the newly graduated. The teacher decides who becomes an apprentice. That does not mean that he excludes his apprentices from the process of selection. Solo, for example, would send a candidate to his first student, Lansine, to talk to. If Lansine found out that the candidate could not co-operate with the other apprentices then that would have been a valid reason to reject the request. However, once a newcomer has been accepted as an apprentice, the follow up activities would be done through Solo's leadership. Master musicians take great pride in teaching their students but also in being students of their teachers: "once a student, always a student of your teacher". They trace their knowledge to their masters and their masters' masters forming lineages of knowledge, not based on blood kinship but rather on mentoring and guiding scholarship very much like western academics do. The next section examines this aspect of hunters' apprenticeship among the Mande people.

## **WHO CAN BECOME A DONSONKONI APPRENTICE**

Not everyone can become a donsonkoni apprentice. There are certain values and virtues that a master musician seeks and expects to find in a suitable apprentice. Integrity, dignity, rectitude, honesty, honour, nobleness, trustworthiness and lack of corruption are all vital and necessary for a successful apprenticeship. According to Solo, mutual respect between teacher and learner is essential for their relationship and the learning curve. Solo based his successful apprenticeship to Yoro on respect, and he claimed that, because of this respect, he was able to gain so much from his teacher. He expected the same respect from his students. Solo would not tolerate and would get rid of, any apprentice who did not show respect to him as was the case of Malamine and Bakaridian, both former students of his. At the end Solo could no longer support their lack of respect and misbehaviour. He asserted: ‘I cannot submit to my teacher and then be submitted to my apprentices! There is no need to continue working with you.’

Solo revealed another aspect of successful apprenticeship when he stressed control, order and patience, “A thoughtful person who is disciplined, who can endure hardships and has a lot of respect and fear for his teacher can become an apprentice.” Even an ill-tempered apprentice, with no respect for other people but who can still feel ashamed before his teacher, may become a good learner providing the teacher is patient with him. The key here is the relationship between the teacher and the apprentice. The teacher must be feared and respected because of his level of knowledge. In turn he has to be patient with the student’s misbehaviour. It is expected that in the long run the student will abandon any vices he may have because of this fear. Solo pointed out that a disrespectful student is considered “naturally an impossible person who cannot control his nasty behaviour.” Solo refers here to the arrogance and disobedience of a student.

Adama Diakite referred to such a student as a ‘worthless person’ who can never become an apprentice. A big hearted but impatient person cannot become one either. Only a patient, cool-blooded and reasonable person, someone who always follows the *karamogó*’s advice can become an apprentice. A good learner never objects to what his elders tell him to do, or as his father, mother or elder brothers want him to do. Such a learner is most likely to accept whatever his teacher asks him to do and will easily comply with apprenticeship principles.

Marital status is also significant in apprenticeship. It is more advantageous if the apprentice is a single man rather than married with family. This is because of the extensive travelling that is required during the apprenticeship. Travels can last up to two months without break. A married student with a family, should provide food and water before leaving. Usually apprentices do not have the economic means to cover the family expenses while they are away on such tours. Adama agreed that it is much easier for a bachelor to become an nkoni kalanden. A married apprentice has daily expenses, such as money for the food market or medicines for his sick child and so forth. It is difficult to meet such demands without a monthly salary, and going away from his family for a certain period of time on a tour, would require providing the family with the necessary funds to help them sustain themselves during his absence. However, family duties do not exclude married men from apprenticeship. Some of them successfully complete their apprenticeship and become karamogow themselves.

It is perceived that an adult, married apprentice with a family and the responsibilities that come with it cannot be taught the same way as a single young man or a child. Whilst the latter will enjoy life away from his parents' house, the former will be troubled, thinking about his own family that he left behind and how they are getting along. Married apprentices who are not wealthy and have no monthly salaries cannot be as versatile as a bachelor who can "force things ahead of time, who can easily move. Humiliation awaits a married apprentice if he tries to behave like a bachelor... They hardly have time to learn as much as single apprentices", Adama explained.

Courage and endurance are very much valued. An apprentice needs the courage to play and travel around with his teacher. He has to endure difficulties and cope with everything his teacher does. The teacher needs to be certain that the apprentice will do everything that he tells him to do and that he will never fail him. The teacher requires mutual trust. He needs to trust his apprentice and count on him and he needs his apprentice to trust him and follow him, obey his commands without asking for explanations and behave as a wise person. These are 'virtues' an apprentice should have in order to be successful. Adama told me: "Before he accepts you, he tells you the principles you have to follow. He tells you what he does not like you to do. If you are sure you cannot comply with these principles you will go to someone else. If you accept what he says, you can start the learning process." The situation for women musicians is somewhat different to that of male apprentices.

## WOMEN PLAYERS

The ambiguous position of women in Mande society is well demonstrated (Hoffman 2000). It is well established in the literature that women are excluded from hunters associations, and yet scholars like Bird and Cashion have both reported the participation of women as singers. Cashion (1984) points toward the suspicion and apprehension of women by hunters, and Herbert (1993) reveals the intricate gender-specific taboos associated with the smelting of iron ore. But as Conrad (1999) points out, women, however dangerous they may be, lay the foundations for male success. “If the femme fatale is an agent of destruction as the betrayer responsible for her male victim’s downfall, it is through this process that she becomes the *sabu* (source/provider) of a significant historical person or event” (Conrad 1999:193). I have seen three women, on different occasions, dressed like and dancing with hunters in public events. I have also seen Solo perform exclusively for women who then also danced. These were public events for the baptism of the child of a traditional healer and diviner (*soma*), wedding celebrations for newlyweds, sons or daughters of hunters and *somaw*. It was towards the end of the events that Solo performed exclusively for the women.

Theoretically women are not excluded from *donsonkoni* apprenticeship. Although it is rare, women can become hunters’ musicians and sing in hunters’ ceremonies with restrictions. Solo, however, has never taught women nor had any women apprentices. Hunters will accept women musicians but there are certain hunters’ ceremonies like the *dankun nataa* and others that women will not be allowed to play. Many *donsonkonifolaw* in the past used to tour with their wives. The women would accompany the harp playing and singing, with the *nege* and would also sing the chorus parts. Such was the case of Saje Diakite but also Seydou Camara, the father of Sekou Camara. Even Solo in the early years of his career as an independent musician used to play with his then fiancée on the *nege*. He also mentioned a video that he watched showing a woman *donsonkonifola* from Burkina Faso who played and actually made the hunters stand up and dance. But he added that, as his teacher said to him, a woman cannot be allowed to attend every single event. The sacred and secret ones are reserved for male hunters only.

Moreover, during the 1950s and 1960s there was a woman *donsonkonifola* in Bamako. Her name was Kunandi Diakite and she was the wife of an *nkonifola* whose name unfortunately remains obscure. He was her teacher and when he passed away, she continued playing for the public. The hunters would invite her to their public events, but not to sacred ones, such as the funerary ceremonies. The reason given for this was that as a woman is still menstruating she would be in danger before hunters' shrines and sacrifices. Kunandi enjoyed much attention and respect from hunters. Her most famous song was 'Ko Bee Deli La' meaning 'intimacy, familiarity or friendship depends on many things.' Another, autobiographical song of hers, *Kunandiya*, which means 'good luck', has been interpreted by Oumou Sangare. There are no recordings of Kunandi in Mali, but I was told that she had been recorded by the French and these recordings probably exist, along with other ones of *Ngonifo Burama*, *Sadje Diakite*, *Madu Diarra* and others in Paris.

## **LINEAGES AND MASTERS**

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF LINEAGE**

While lineage and kinship are not the subject of this section, they are inescapable topics when discussing hunters' musicians. Solo's surname *Konate* is a name of nobles, *hōrōn*. It is actually the surname given to the little brother of Keita, which is the surname of the first emperor of Mali, *Sundjata Keita*. The *Konate* do not belong to an artisan group such as the *jeliw* (griots) or the *numuw* (blacksmiths) or the *garankew* (leatherworkers). Solo explained that when his family moved to *Numubugu* they had to change their profession and become blacksmiths, retaining their social identity as nobles. *Numubugu* means the land of the blacksmiths. Blacksmiths also work the wood, especially carving, and part of that is also canoe making. They need special powers to handle *pama*, the vital force that the iron and wood contain (Cashion 1984; McNaughton 1988).

Adama Diakite got married as an *nkoni* apprentice. He met his wife through an acquaintance he came across in their performances. Adama is a strict parent and wanted their children to behave better than himself. He was brought up this way and as a father he follows his father's discipline. He argued that since it worked for him it must be a good for his children too. Their mother also contributed to their upbringing, supporting Adama. The uncle, the grandfather and the grandmother all did their share of work, as

well. All senior family members contributed to the children's education and discipline. Adama was eager to teach his children the good manners he acquired from his parents and relatives. In general, if a mother is a thoughtful and righteous person, her child is not expected to make unacceptable mistakes. When the father is away, the mother replaces him and disciplines the children by giving them advice.

The first lesson of respect a child has to master is to greet people. If strangers come to the house, the child has to offer them water to drink, water to bath and food to eat. This is customary and also applies to non-strangers like friends, family or acquaintances who visit other households. According to Adama, a parent should teach the child how to be humble and behave accordingly to other family members and people outside the family. He believed that a child brought up with shouting and anger will end up speaking and behaving to other people with an angry voice and authoritarian mood. Children must address other people as their elders. As a parent, Adama is supposed to teach his children by pointing out the wrong-doings. The art of speaking is part of showing respect and part of the education a child should receive. Not all children learn how to speak well.

Adama's children were too young to teach them how to sing or play music, how to praise other people (*fasaw*). He did not teach them how to dance either because, he claimed that, "they are not oriented toward music." However he was willing to teach them how to recite people's histories (*tarik*). According to Adama, a male child has to be instructed to take good care of his mother. That would make him a blessed child. He also has to be close to his father so he can show him how to become wise, to grow into an ideal person in the society. To do so, the boy needs to respect and listen to his father's teachings. Otherwise, he will become a cursed child who does everything wrongly, will never learn good manners or how to behave in the community. As both father and son grow older, the father becomes weaker and the child becomes stronger, soon to be married. The father will teach him how a husband should behave to his wife. The relationship between father and son is stressed to reveal the close ties that are needed for an exchange of knowledge. The son's approach to his father is considered essential as Adama stated, "If a son comes near to his father, the latter will teach him all those things. How can a son be wise without coming near his father?"

The father becomes a model for the hunter *karamog* who claims responsibility for the education of his pupil. A father can teach his son how to sing, play the harp and



even dance, providing that he is a hunters' musician himself. He can teach him how to praise people. The only condition is that the son is musically inclined. At the appropriate age, a talented son can be taught by his father how to become a donsonkonifola. He can also be taught the meaning of symbols in relation to magic spells and esoteric powers that the father may possess. A father will not teach all these things to a young child. He will wait for his son to grow older.

Solo placed his first encounter with the hunters' harp in 1982 when he saw Yoro Sidibe from Bambala, Wasulu, performing in Bamako. He loved the sound at the hunters' performance ("the time my soul loved the nkoni") and later on, in his twenties went to Yoro's house to become his apprentice. Solo considered Yoro as his 'father' following the common practice that requires all younger people to consider their elders as their parents but also because he was his teacher, master and friend. He did not learn to play the harp by himself as other donsonkonifolaw did (Seydou Camara for example).

To support this, Solo employed the metaphors of kinship: "As our fathers told us, a learner's teacher is as important as his parents!" According to Solo, an apprentice must respect his father and mother first and then his teacher. Solo's father taught him that a learner must seek his teacher's *barika*, blessing. Even if he said something intolerable, Solo would never question his father who he regards as his first teacher in life. Yet, students do not always have the same upbringing and 'way of understanding things.' This is why Yoro often fought with students who did not understand that they should not question their parents or teachers.

Yoro and Moussaba, one of his former apprentices, parted after such a fight. Solo never fought with Yoro, rather he used to say that Solo really respected him and that he had never seen him angry. Solo explained that it would be against his best interest to have a fighting relationship with his teacher, as he commented, "that means I am doing bad to myself". Yoro, according to Solo, loved him because of his general behaviour as a student/apprentice. He loved him more than the other students of his from his homeland, Wasulu. Solo and his former classmates keep in touch and visit each other and their teacher. All Yoro's former students pay regular visits to their teacher. They meet at his house, talk and exchange ideas. They had become part of Yoro's family. In this way, a very serious, committed and determined apprentice finally turns into a member of the teacher's family.

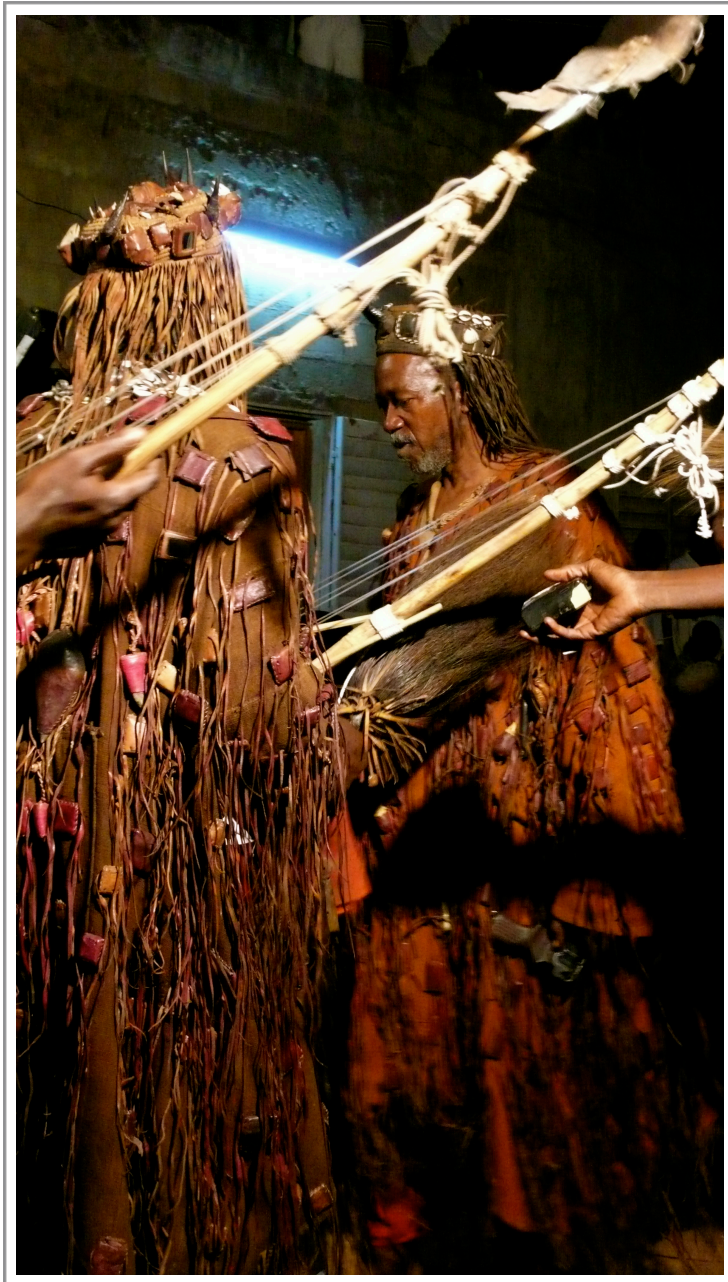


Fig. 4  
Solo praising his teacher Yoro Sidibe as they dance face to face in a public ceremony in Lafiabougou, Bamako (March 2010).

### **BEING A MASTER**

Once released, the graduate is allowed to take apprentices. In fact, he needs them in order to form his own band or ensemble. The apprentices accompany him to concerts, public events, private soirées and hunters' ceremonies. They do not need to be hunters or initiates. All they need is the will to learn the art of the donsonkoni, hunters' music. A new musician is obliged to form his own ensemble so he can perform. Once released, the new master will be asked to play for his own audiences. If he cannot find someone

to accompany him right away he may enlist his old schoolmates to help. If the teacher is not playing that day, he will invite them to give him a hand.

Solo created his own team in 2000 but could not say exactly how long it took him to assemble it. During my fieldwork he had seven apprentices who were:

1. Malamine Ouattara, Cemogo Doumbia's grandson. He was unable to continue his apprenticeship and abandoned the team.
2. Bakaridian, who also did not stay for long.
3. Lansine Kone, who became his 'number one' student.
4. Adama Diakite.
5. Namani Konate, Solo's youngest brother
6. Kalifa Keita, the youngest of the apprentices and
7. Namakoro Traore, the author of this dissertation.

Solo had one more apprentice for a while, Ladji from France. He came to him with musical knowledge of the harp, to improve his skills and had returned to France. Lansine, Adama and Namani were in their twenties with Lansine being the oldest and Adama the youngest of the three. Kalifa was much younger, at the time no more than sixteen. All of them were from Bamako and lived in the Djikoroni area where Solo also resided. Following the norm, it was they who approached Solo and expressed their desire to become his apprentices. When I left the field in the spring of 2011, they were still with Solo as their only teacher.

An apprentice may have more than one teacher, depending on his orientation. In most cases there is only one master (*bolodon karamogɔ*) but this does not prevent a student from 'hanging out' with other masters to acquire knowledge that they possess. As a student of Yoro, Solo, would often pay visits to other masters, such as Satigi from Bambala and Guimba from Bala (Bala Guimba Diakite). He was interested to learn more about the musical style of the former and esoteric knowledge of the latter. Both these masters did not perform anymore but it was this exchange of ideas that Solo repeatedly tried to add to Yoro's teachings.

Every teacher has his own approach or method in teaching apprentices. Solo differentiated his method from that of his teacher's by saying that, Yoro, as the oldest and wisest of all *donsonkonifolaw*, his apprentices fear him and always feel ashamed before him. They would not speak in an indecent, rude or vulgar way before him. Whereas, Solo had a different approach to his apprentices.

He wanted them to interact with one another and become friends. He also wanted them to become friends with him; to treat him as a fatherly figure or a big brother. This way it would be easier for him to know their intentions and easier to find out any problems that they may have. Solo expected them to visit him every day and check on each other. For him, it was a two-way relationship. When he did not see them for two days, he paid them a visit [he never left me for more than 48 hours on my own even if I asked him to] to see if everything was all right.

A released apprentice may continue to perform with the same teacher or take lessons from a different one. For example, although Yoro released Toba Seydou Traore many years ago, they continued to play together, both having their own apprentices. Students stay close to their teachers so that they can learn deeper secrets from them. One can seek knowledge from a different teacher and approach him to become his 'apprentice'. Learning, in this context, is a long process that involves demanding the appropriate knowledge from experts and includes information, guidance and advice on hunting, protection and performance matters.

Hunters' musicians acquire knowledge from their masters but also from hunters, sorcerers, diviners and other musicians that belong to the hunting brotherhood. In these communities of practice, young apprentices model themselves, imitate and learn by practising their skills together, under the supervision of their *karamogo*. Apprentices also learn from stories, tales and anecdotes that their masters narrate in gatherings at their homes or ideally in the countryside or the bush. Storytelling, according to Jackson (2002) is a strategy for transforming private into public meaning but also one for sustaining 'a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances. To reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one's own imagination' (ibid: 14-5). Numerous times Solo told us stories under a tree during the afternoon hours prior to a performance. All students used to gather around him, on a big mat, and listened to his vivid narration as part of the learning process.

## **THE LEARNING PROCESS**

Ideally, if the teacher has the means, all apprentices must live in his compound with his family. They lodge in his compound for the whole duration of their apprenticeship. The teacher has his own *nkoni* but there are other *nkoniw* available for the students, around

the compound. Every musician should be able to construct his own instrument, however, not all know how. Solo is an excellent nkoni maker. He made all the harps the ensemble use and was often commissioned to do the same for other musicians. He taught all his apprentices how to build their own instruments. Each apprentice could practice on his own but if he had a question about a rhythm, technique or singing, he would go to Solo. Solo would answer the question and demonstrate the correct way to play the piece of music or song. Sometimes, apprentices formed groups and practised together. They jammed. The teacher would listen and correct every mistake he noticed. If he was satisfied with the performance of the group he would congratulate and encourage them. He would do the same during and after public performances. The teacher would listen and make suggestions.



Fig. 5: L-R: Theodore Konkouris and Solo Konate performing for a soma in Moribambougou (photo taken by Lansine Kone, November 2010).

Fundamental in this learning process is the sound of the harp. An apprentice needs to master its sound. For weeks I was struggling to get the right sound out of the donsonkoni. The instrument appears simple and easy to play but in reality it is hard to master. Solo would tell me over and over again, “You are concentrating too much. You need to relax and look me in the eyes. Don’t look at your instrument when you play. Listen to the sound! Try to reproduce the sound that I make. You need to listen!” Many times the other apprentices would come to my aid as well. They too insisted that I listen carefully to the sound of the harp. Playing the iron scraper is equally demanding. One

may hit and scrape it but the desirable sound is achieved through a specific angle. The apprentices are guided by the sound they produce to find this angle. Once found, it is easier to play the scraper at various speeds.

If the teacher has limited means, not enough space or the economic ability to accommodate and maintain his students, apprentices will live elsewhere in the city; however, it is difficult for the teacher to assess their progress. That leaves him with the option of public performances to listen and to instruct his apprentices. The teacher's task is to correct any mistakes in the standard rhythms that have been created. Some of these have evolved from older rhythms and have been modified. If an apprentice plays a new rhythm that he is working on, the teacher will not interfere but if he is playing a 'standard' incorrectly then the teacher most likely will. Solo's apprentices were keen in creating new rhythms. They had Solo as an example of a good and successful composer who continues Yoro's tradition of new songs and rhythms.

To Solo, learning the harp, and apprenticeship in general, is like going to school and eventually graduating. A student attends classes year after year until his graduation. A hunters' musician apprentice does the same. Studying the harp requires certain learning steps. Some students are faster learners than others. A fast learner is able to practise by himself and acquire many rhythms easily. Even when the teacher is away, he will be practising and improvising on the harp and learning the songs. He observes and listens to the teacher's playing techniques at which time he can be released in three years. A slow learner should be able to graduate in ten years. If he cannot, the teacher must let him go; Solo explained "it means that you were unable to teach him" and "in such a case, you need to tell him [that] playing the harp cannot be your occupation. Try to learn another trade". Some poor learners cannot play the rhythms correctly, and others cannot sing, nor master the art of speech. Solo claimed that these learners were hindrance to others, as they would never be able to take their place next to the master, playing the second harp and singing with him. When the first student is incompetent, then all other students suffer as they need to wait until their master decides what to do with him. Solo stayed with Yoro for ten whole years and not less as one would expect from a young prodigy like him. His older peers were not so talented and this was a fact that delayed his graduation, as older peers should graduate one by one according to their seniority in the ensemble.



## TEACHING TECHNIQUES

Yoro measured his students' progress during performances such as the openings of hunters' public ceremonies, *ɲɛnaje*. Students will play and sing up to a certain point in the night and, then, the master will take over. This point at which they stop is not fixed and depends on the season (ceremonies during the hot and rainy seasons start later than the ones taking place in the cold season) and the number of the master musicians involved in the ceremony. In that latter case, all the masters perform after all the apprentices and they do so depending on their hierarchy within the association. The younger master-members start first and the older ones follow. I have witnessed the same process in more private ceremonies like the *simboni*, the post funerary ceremony for the hunter.

Public ceremony is a testing ground for apprentices. It is there that they employ their skills as instrumentalists and singers. In the presence of hunters and the wider audience, they perform and test their efficacy. If they perform well, they should be able to get a hunter to dance and the crowd will cheer. Hunters will fire their guns, women will scream and children will start running around, shouting and looking for a place to hide before returning to the performance site to watch the hunters dance. A whole soundscape, including both the presentations of hunters and enthusiasm of audience, is created by a successful performance. The apprentices then will know that they did well. In the opposite case, nothing happens: no hunter will get up and dance, the audience will remain silent and gunshots will be reserved for the master musician.

*Donsonkoni* cannot be taught without discipline. When the learner is playing, the teacher must appraise the following: How does he behave? How does he treat people? What does he say when he is playing for a given audience? Solo claims that Yoro used to record his students' attempts in the various performances with his own tape recorder. He would then listen to them in his house and make comments. He paid attention to the speech and playing. By speech, *kuma*, he was referring to the manner of singing but most importantly to the use of words. By playing, he was referring to the actual ability of the student to sound the harp the right way. A teacher must control the learner in his daily activities. "This is how he appreciates our progress. Whenever he sees the apprentice doing wrong, he must call him and tell him [the truth]," adds Adama.

Solo adopted his teacher's teaching methods with a few modifications but admitted that if he found some better ideas he would be willing to incorporate them in Yoro's system. He said, "If I find out that such ideas, added to my ideas, will make me famous, I will add them to mine." And added, "The world itself is a school. We cannot finish learning." He was very realistic when discussing the length of time it took his pupils to learn: "if I tell you that I can teach one apprentice per year and release him the same year, I would be telling lies to you!" If the apprentice excelled during his apprenticeship and Solo was sure that he would be able to do well on his own, then he would release him regardless the number of years of the apprenticeship: "The world has become a place where things go fast. If you retain someone for a very long period of time, you prevent him from meeting his interests and his needs."

The teacher has to monitor the apprentices. Some of them express themselves the wrong way. A *donsonkonifola* must learn to control what he sings before singing in public. He must select the right words and know what and how to sing them. Solo explained that as a hunters' bard, "Control your way of conveying your message. You must ask yourself the following question: what will come out of this idea if say it for the audience to hear?" In a mixed audience there are elders who need to be treated with respect and the apprentice should be careful with his vocabulary not to offend them. One has to consider every word before singing it. The teacher has to control the apprentice's way of addressing the audience. Solo believes that a teacher knows when his student has become a good player through his way of playing the harp, his way of singing, his talent in the art of *tɛrɛmeli*, and the words he uses while playing. These are the criteria in appraising a student.

## **SUBJECTS TAUGHT**

A hunters' musician is able to teach three different subjects: music, esoteric knowledge and hunting techniques. According to Solo, the range of the subjects taught depends on the apprentice's motivation. Some students want to learn everything the teacher knows. Sometimes the teacher can also be a sorcerer (*soma*) and/or diviner (*latrudala*) or just a fetish worshiper (*boli*, power object, fetish). It is up to the student to ask his teacher to introduce and teach him these arts. Some students are only interested in the art of *nkoni* playing and not in hunting, esoteric power, or power objects (fetishes).



Solo followed his teacher on matters of hunting and its techniques. Yoro told his students that in order to appreciate the meat that hunters bring to them, it was mandatory to go into the bush. They could go alone or in the company of other hunters but it was imperative that they experienced the hardships and suffering of the hunter who spends days or weeks in the bush hunting animals to bring back to the village, to them, his musicians and praise singers. A serious hunters' musician should be trained as a musician and a hunter. With hunting comes esoteric and magic power. A hunter is powerless without such powers. They protect him from the seen and unseen creatures of the bush; the wild, dangerous animals and the spirits that inhabit it. As Adama stated, "It



Fig. 6  
Between the hunters' post funerary ceremony and the evening public event in Faraba, Lansine went bird hunting. He poses here, seated, with a borrowed rifle while Kalifa stands behind him holding the game (February 2011).

is a topic we can hardly talk about because our knowledge hasn't reached this level yet.

We can talk a little bit about nkoni music, how long we have been doing this, or what the rewards and hardships of apprenticeship. Yet, none of us has the appropriate age to learn about esoteric power. We are not old enough yet.”

All of Solo’s apprentices expressed the desire to learn different techniques of divination, were fascinated by power objects and hoped to become accomplished healers. Healing and ‘the science of the trees’ is very much appreciated among hunters and ordinary people. The first step into the world of obscurity, magic, esoteric power and the occult is the science of the trees, yiridon or what is known in Western terms as ethnopharmacology. All of Solo’s apprentices have some level of proficiency in healing and herb gathering from the bush. Lansine is a successful hunter of small game who hopes to acquire a rifle at some point, to do some more hunting. Solo is teaching him hunting techniques and healing remedies and practices. Apart from Lansine who has shown considerable maturity, responsibility, patience and initiative to learn beyond the art of nkoni playing and singing, the other apprentices have to be patient, respectful and manage their eagerness, frustration, anger and disappointment so that Solo can consider them worthy of acquiring secret knowledge. The next section examines how emotional management facilitates the transmission of knowledge during apprenticeship. It starts though with a short review of the literature on emotions focusing on the musical emotions that are generated during performance and the effect that these have on listeners.

## **CONTROLLING EMOTIONS**

Mande hunters cannot be characterised as introvert or extrovert, emotionless or volatile since the association is varied and all-inclusive welcoming nobles and artisans, descendants of slaves, foreigners, young and old in the brotherhood. Having said that, it is well established that hunters who are called to dance during ceremonies feel pride, emotional arousal and a deep sense of accomplishment as well as uncertainty (Cashion 1984; Strawn 2011). A donsonkonifola in front of an audience becomes the focal point of events. He is open to criticism but is also expected to criticise, challenge and praise hunters present at the event. He is responsible for the efficacy of the event. As Solo used to say, “You must know what to say and not to say!”

According to Solo anger is unsuitable for the hunters’ musician. Such a musician has to have self-control. If the learner exhibits anger and uncontrollable behaviour the

teacher must come forward and tell him to stop. Musicians should have “cool blood.” They should be able to calm down annoyed, irritated or aggressive audiences. This notion concurs with the wider belief of resolution between quarrelling human beings. It is usually the griot, the hereditary musician, who intervenes but in the context of hunters’ ceremonies, this role is assumed by the donsonkonifola. An angry musician is of no use to any audience, calm or angry. He must control his temper. This was what Yoro taught Solo and what Solo passed on his own. For these musicians, learning how to play hunters’ music on their instrument is not enough. Of course they learn how to play the harp but at the same time they learn how to behave, have good manners, and acquire the qualities of the “ideal man”.<sup>48</sup> The teacher is there to help them with their life.

Apprentices learn how to control their emotions but also learn through them. Apprenticeship in hunters’ context is associated with suffering. Students wait for months or even years to get a certain piece of knowledge they desire. Meanwhile, they learn how to be patient and humble; to show no sign of arrogance; not to be critical of their senior hunter brothers and of their master. Senior hunters and masters are holders of knowledge and have authority. Apprentices should be obedient and respectful. Solo and Sekou told me in different occasions: “If one [an apprentice] knows so much, then there is no need for him to be a student! What am I supposed to teach him? He knows it all!” Such an apprentice is at risk of losing his teacher. Hunters and apprentices always refer to each other as *karamogow*, but when asked individually all claim to be *kalandenw*. This kind of humility or modesty prevents them from physical and social harm. Hunters frequently test each other’s powers and knowledge by throwing *kɔrɔtɛ*, lethal spell. Bragging and showing that one has powerful secrets is dangerous because he will be challenged by such spells. Additionally, humility and modesty allow for transmission of knowledge and keep the channels of transmission open to the members of the brotherhood.

In the remainder of the chapter, I show how emotionally charged it is to be a *donsonkonifola*, the emotional relationship between the master and the apprentice, the possible failure of apprenticeship but also the expectations and wishes of teachers and students and finally discuss the transition from student to master musician.

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<sup>48</sup> Man in Bamana is *mogɔ*, while *mogɔya* stands for personhood, a Mande concept which I explore on Chapter Seven.

## **BEING A Donsonkonifola**

Playing and performing hunters' music has become Solo's profession. This was how he provided for his family and everything he owned to that day was a result of this. He followed Yoro's teachings and was grateful to God for being on good terms with many hunters' chiefs who held him in high esteem. Solo claimed that the learner was obliged to learn how to play all of his teacher's rhythms. All teachers want is an audience to recognise who taught the students. To be able to tell that a student plucks the strings like his teacher, employing the same technique, or that he has the same singing style and phrasing. He is using the similar stock phrases and lines as his teacher. Although a Bamana speaker from Beledougou, Solo sang in Wasulunke just like his teacher, Yoro.

As I was told, in the past, patience and 'cool blood' were required to acquire secret knowledge that included esoteric power and magic spells. As a result apprentices had to be calm and wise with their teachers. A student had to make himself available to his teacher anytime of the day or night since masters used to be very strict about this. Only very polite and generous apprentices would obtain a secret spell from them, as Solo explained. Knowledge was hard to acquire and transmission was a very slow process, until the apprentice earned his teacher's trust.

Mande hunters deal with two types of esoteric power: benevolent and malevolent. An unwise person with malevolent powers is very dangerous to the community and especially to his own family. In a rage of anger he could use his powers to harm and potentially kill one of his fellow humans. Actions, in Mande thought, occur with reactions, so the act of harming someone is followed by a boomerang effect that may harm a member of the agent's family. A teacher has to be, and normally is, in a position to identify those who might misuse their powers and refuse to pass malevolent spells to him.

Solo knew of apprentices who tried to bribe or purchase magic spells from knowledgeable hunters, but they refused to take money as they had not offered money to acquire them. Spells must be transmitted with just one criterion: wisdom (*timinandyia*). It means the constant and patient coming and going to the master's house numerous times. However, some masters are fond of money and are ready to give away such knowledge for a fee. The apprentice will pay the fee and acquire the secret spell on the spot. Such students experience a great deal of frustration because of their impatience. They are eager to acquire a spell and cannot wait for long. A responsible

teacher would never accommodate their desire and will try to reason with them. Unfortunately that is not always the case and the students end up with more than they can handle: a very dangerous spell.

Learning to handle and control esoteric power will depend on the students' behaviour towards their *karamɔgɔ*. Students seek to further their music apprenticeship to include knowledge of the occult. However, master musicians are reluctant to share such powerful knowledge with new apprentices. Building trust is essential in this master-student relationship. Solo has expressed feelings of worry and uncertainty regarding students whom he cannot entrust. For him, the transmission of secret knowledge to "someone who does not know well" leaves him vulnerable and exposed to a number of things, mainly the student's disposition and his own reputation. A misuse of the power by the student, puts the master's reputation at risk. Furthermore, in the rare case of a falling out between the master and the apprentice, the latter may decide to harm his master. In such a case, as Solo puts it, "You will have difficulties to find a place to hide yourself that day."

Today, it is very common for the apprentices to do another parallel activity such as a day job to earn a living. It is regarded as difficult to acquire sufficient knowledge, if one is not fully dedicated to the art of *donsonkoni*. The teacher always wants his students to become as skilful as possible, even if they cannot reach his own level of performance. That means that the student has reached an estimable step in playing the *nkoni*. Adama believed that this fact alone would make the teacher famous, "This is a great honour for the teacher himself! The apprentice will become famous too and profit from this situation." The more fame and popularity a *donsonkonifola* has, the more invitations he will get for events to perform and eventually he will earn more money.

### **MASTER - APPRENTICE INTERACTION**

Solo remembered that when he was an apprentice, he and his mates would gather at Yoro's house in the afternoon and engage in discussions. Sometimes these would take place during walks around the area. It was usually between 04:00pm and 07:00pm that these gatherings happened. From time to time, Yoro himself would join them to discuss one of his problems. He would say that this was a matter to be solved and he wanted to listen to their opinions: "it is not a matter of being an apprentice. It is not a matter of being a teacher. The problem needs to be resolved."

Solo explained that there were no specific learning schedules or timetables. Yoro would never sit them all down to teach them a rhythm or song. It never worked like in a classroom. Solo always perceived Yoro as half human, half jinn.<sup>49</sup> When he played and sang a song that they did not understand, they waited for the right moment to ask him questions about it. If he was in the right mood to answer them, they went ahead but if he was not, they just had to wait for the right moment. They would pick up their harps and practise the song between them. Eventually Yoro would comment. If the way they sang or played was wrong he would correct them. There were other times that Yoro would sit with them in the centre of the yard and teach them the song in question. Yoro's apprentices feared him and expressed a great deal of tact. They would never harass or annoy him. They would not irritate him and disrupt his mental or emotional state. That would be interpreted as disrespect and irresponsibility, insensitivity and irrationality.

Yoro demanded respect and wisdom from his apprentices. There are different ways a student can show this to his teacher. As a rule, an apprentice should do for his teacher whatever he can to please him. He can come to the teacher's house and offer his services to him and his family. He may build, cut wood logs, go to the market, feed the beasts, clean the yard, wash the car, entertain the children, carry things around, help with hunting jobs, or get some medicinal plants from the forest, do all sorts of errands. He should also pay regular visits to his teacher and offer him small amounts of money (1,000-1,500 FCFA) for cola nuts, some cigarettes or a small bag of tea and sugar.

Apprentices are not expected to pay a tuition fee for nkoni learning. The money that flows from the apprentice to the teacher indicates respect and wisdom, the intellectual capacity of the individual to realise his submission to his master, to acknowledge superiority and status, the hierarchy among the brotherhood in general and the musical ensemble in particular. Solo himself paid unexpected visits to Yoro to give him small sums of money: 500, 1,000 or 5,000 FCFA (60p to £6). This way he maintained a relationship with his master to please him. Even when they met in performances, Solo always offered something to his teacher. Yoro on the other hand acknowledged Solo's respect and wisdom by inviting him to play at some of the performances he could not attend either because he was booked to play somewhere else or because he had other, personal, affairs. Solo therefore benefited from these

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<sup>49</sup> Yoro Sidibe is renowned for his magic powers and occult practices. He is feared by the most powerful hunters and sorcerers. Hence, Solo perceived him partly as a jinn.

performances by earning money and fame. He had become well known in Bamako but also throughout Mali. Maintaining a healthy relationship with Yoro, Solo built a name in the hunters' music scene and gained respect and secret knowledge from hunters who got to know him and appreciated his talent as a praise singer and ethos as a hunter and human being.

To reciprocate this, Solo used another strategy. After each concert, offered to him by Yoro, he gathered all the earnings in a plastic bag and told his students that they were going to pay Yoro a visit to his house. They used some of the money for fuel. In the past, when Solo did not have a car, they used either taxis or the green buses of Bamako (sotrāma). When they arrived at Yoro's house, Solo handed him the bag saying that this was what they earned that time and that he only took out the transport money. Mostly, Yoro would offer the bag back to Solo without keeping any of the money because now Solo has a wife and family to take care of. Solo would insist that money is not important, asking instead for Yoro's blessings: "Karamɔgɔ, to me, you're much more valuable than money!" Solo treated his own students the same way. He wanted them to offer him only small amounts of money to please him; whatever they could afford so that he knew that they respected him. This made them, in his eyes, wise men and gave him courage to teach them better. Offerings of this kind make the apprentices blessed persons.

A powerful emotional response for a student is the one regarding the failure of apprenticeship. I was told that it is impossible for a master to teach an apprentice who spends a year or two trying to learn a couple of nkoni rhythms. Such a learner is destined to fail. He has to be classified as incompetent. It is also difficult for an apprentice to succeed if he is envious of his teacher's earnings; if he is greedy for money. Solo spoke from experience but would not specify the name of his student. He was one of his first and they used to travel together to rural places where Solo first discovered his greed for money. In small villages people offer the donsonkonifola whatever they have and this is most frequently small coins of 25, 50 or 100 FCFA. They put it in the nkoni's gourd during performance. At the end of the performance, Solo would empty the gourd and put the money in a plastic bag and entrust it to this student without counting it. If the village is bigger and the performance a successful one, sometimes this sum would be 50-60,000 FCFA, a very decent amount for a day's work (which includes travelling and performing in the evening throughout the night).

Solo would take his team and return to Bamako and only then would ask this apprentice to take the money out of the bag to count it. Instead, the student looked up in the sky and took a lucky guess about the sum. Every time he guessed, he guessed correctly, within an approximate range of 50 or 100 FCFA. Solo realised that this student was counting the money during performance. Instead of concentrating on the performance and the playing, he was more interested in the moneymaking. He had been with Solo for the money. From that moment, Solo started watching him closely and found out that this was a pattern that happened in every performance. In the end he was forced to talk to him: “Man, illusion solves no problem. You’d better go and look for a new job. That would be more profitable for you than playing the nkoni. You can’t become a nkoni player.”

Motivated students are highly regarded depending on the source of their motivation to become nkoni players. Although wealth can be decidedly motivating, it is hardly appreciated by hunters. To them, a *donsonkonifola* should expect traditional rewards for his services, such as cola nuts and wild game. Hunters may welcome wealth that is the outcome of hard work but do not consider musicians who seek it passionately, as true followers of *donsoya*. In the event described above, Solo was forced to send away a student because of his obsession with money. He told me that he was very disappointed and annoyed by the student’s behaviour. Teachers and students have their particular expectations and desires when involved in such an apprenticeship.

Solo’s aim was to take all his apprentices to the same level of competence when it came to nkoni playing, singing and dancing. He “loved” all his apprentices the same way and did not distinguish or discriminate between them. He pointed out that, as the learning process took its course, some students became more familiar with him than others. Usually students were expected to pay him morning and afternoon visits everyday. Some stayed for a while, others would pass by to see how he was doing. Solo wanted his students to be involved in his daily life. He considered me as the student most likely to know how he was doing, and to share all of his worries or emergencies with me, if he or a member of his family was sick, because I spent most of my time at his compound with his family. It also facilitated the sharing and exchange of ideas as a feeling of trust and our companionship was built quickly and mutually.



## **TRANSITIONING FROM Kalandenya TO Karamogoya**

A hunters' musician apprentice today, is most likely to do additional activities to support his family, earn a living and so forth. The teacher will not prevent him from doing these but when he is in need of his student then the latter must cease anything he might be doing to go and serve his teacher. Once he is done, he might return to his own activities. Serving the teacher is a measure of respect. "Passivity never pays, being a loafer never pays. One cannot sit down and watch his karamogoya working" Adama explained. It is inapt for a student to ask his karamogoya to teach him whilst he is doing nothing for him in return. He must never interrupt his teacher as he is speaking. Hierarchy should always be maintained. An inexperienced student is not considered wiser than his teacher hence his saying cannot be more valid than his teacher's. There are certain activities that are forbidden to the student. The teacher alone is entitled to do these. Especially in hunters' meetings, the students must show how much they respect their karamogoya. They should stay close to him unless he tells them not to, they must remain silent unless they are asked to speak and they should respond at once and vigorously to his commands.

Apprentices are also required to respond to elder hunters, their kərow (older brothers), especially the ones who are close to their karamogoya. As part of the teacher's family, they are regarded as his sons and treated like such by the other members of the family. They can enjoy family meals, socialising and support but they also have responsibilities. They are expected to take care of any errands that are pending such as taking the children to school, do some shopping for the household, carry water, logs, domestic animals, cleaning guns and washing the car of their teacher. As an apprentice, one does whatever the teacher's wife tells him to do without questioning. It is mandatory for apprentices to follow her orders. She is treated as a mother figure.

The transition from student to master is achieved through perseverance, patience, wisdom, politeness, courage and the talent to understand other people. These virtues can do that. An apprentice who does not listen to his karamogoya, who cares less about his advice, who only cares about his own decisions, "this kind of apprentice will hardly finish well his apprenticeship. He will never become a karamogoya", Adama stated.

## GRADUATION DAY

The most important day for a student is ‘graduation day’, the day that the teacher declares that the student is ready to be released and earned the right to perform as a hunters’ musician, have his own students and tour the land. It is a great day for both teacher and student, and a highly charged emotional experience. Solo remarked, “Truly, the day my teacher released me, he released me with great pleasure in his heart” and described that day:

It was the chief of the hunters of Djikoroni, Cemogo Doumbia, that gave me to Yoro as an apprentice, so the day Yoro wanted to release me, he brought me to Cemogo’s house and said “Really, he is young. Yet the way he behaves, he doesn’t have to lose courage. He needs to tie up his belt. If God gives him long life and good health, one day will come when I will not be anymore. The only person who is able to replace me, if I am not mistaken, it is only this young man because he is so patient and so wise. He is such a good singer. I trust him more than any other student of the group I have. He follows my behaviour. He knows how to start and how to finish a performance. I watched him in all his actions. Even his way of walking when he starts playing. I appreciate all of that. when he stands up, ready to play, he knows which foot to move first.” That day he said all these things about me. He said many encouraging words. That is how we separated... I am confident in my teacher’s talent. Anywhere I play his rhythms, I won’t be humiliated, bow down my head.

The day a student is released, he can perform in his own right as a hunters’ musician. The master will make a hunter’s performance tunic, trousers and hat. He also constructs a harp and offers them all to the student. The master will inform the parents and the hunters where the performance will be held, which normally takes place on the night of the graduation day. The teacher will sit down with the hunters who will judge the graduate. Some will agree that he is ready and some will not, but the teacher stays silent and leaves the verdict to the hunters who form the ‘jury’. The hunters criticise the singing and playing and often make comments like “karamogo, your apprentice’s playing is good but he is not a good singer” or “he is too proud.” That day, hunters are allowed to talk about the student’s faults and they give the teacher feedback about the

student. They can make suggestions about the playing and singing, his behaviour towards the hunters and the performance: “if you want to release him, tell him that in order to be in good terms with us hunters, he needs to follow such and such ways!”

## **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I have discussed hunters’ musicians and how they identify themselves through lineages of knowledge and learning. Apprenticeship among Mande hunters in general and hunters’ musicians in particular is regarded a great responsibility and a prestigious commitment on behalf of the students. Hunters and masters have great expectations from the apprentices as they are perceived as the ones who will carry on the tradition of *donsoya*, the cultural heritage, moral code and worldview of hunters’ societies. Through imitation and practice, apprentices learn how to construct, repair and play the *nkoni*, how to sing and dance hunters’ songs and epics and prepare themselves for long and tiring performances in hunters secular and sacred events and ceremonies. Through sound, apprentices learn how to perceive and interact with their environment, be it the inhospitable bush or the buzzing modern space of the city. They embody the sounds of their habitat, the sound of the harp and the *kutsuba* (iron scraper) and dance to the rhythms of the music, to negotiate their sociality and identity as hunters. They learn to control their emotions, to behave as proper hunters and to bond together making their teacher’s ensemble sound disciplined, confident and competitive. This way they may perform with efficacy, attract attention and receive invitations for more performances, making their teacher proud, well known and in demand. In the following chapter I discuss hunters’ music, its styles, instruments and musical properties in relation to symbolism and meaning.

# CHAPTER THREE

## HUNTERS' MUSIC

### INTRODUCTION

Western scholars have written very little about the musical tradition of the Mande hunters. Charry (2000) and Duran (2000) refer to it as one of the oldest musical genres in Mali, implying a certain continuity and static nature. Although I recognise that their conclusions may be based on their ideas about the conservative spirit of the Bamana and the Maninka people, I will argue that hunters' music is a dynamic and evolving tradition. Hobsbawm (1983: 1) defines 'invented traditions' as:

A set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms or behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.

But as he quickly suggests, this continuity with a historic past is factitious and invented traditions are ultimately responses to novel situations that refer to either older ones or establish their own past to refer to. Hobsbawm offers a distinction between 'tradition' and 'custom' that dominates the so-called 'traditional' societies. The object and characteristic of 'tradition' is *invariance*. Inventing 'traditions' is 'a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition' (ibid: 4). When I arrived in Mali in 2009 and started my preliminary research, people would tell me that the hunters' repertoire was fixed and that there was no room for creation, invention and novelty to balance the rigid and conservative society of the hunters. But, as I was to discover, that was not the case at all.

In this chapter, I begin by contrasting the different regional musical styles of Mande hunters' music and illustrate how hunters' music occupies a distinctive genre among other musical traditions in Mali such as the *jeli* tradition and the *wassoulou* musical style;<sup>50</sup> I, then, describe the musical instruments the hunters' musicians use to perform; and outline the repertoire of hunters' songs and rhythms; their symbolism and

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<sup>50</sup> Duran (1995:101) distinguishes between the two spellings of the word to refer to the region (*Wasulu*) that the kamalenkoni originated and the musical style that it created (*wassoulou*), in accordance with music industry standards.

meaning. I also analyse some of the hunters' texts and their nuances, particularly Ntana, one of Solo's praise-songs.

I show how hunters' musicians negotiate and transform their own and other hunters' identities, as well as creating a conceptual space for the common people to relate to and identify with the hunters' societies and brotherhoods. They do this through song, hunters' epics and hunting stories. My aim is to provide evidence and back up my claim that this dynamic musical tradition inspires, stimulates and stirs contemporary Malians in Bamako, a fact that makes it so popular as a genre among the people.

## **HUNTERS' MUSIC REGIONAL STYLES**

Holt (2007: 2-3), Frith (1998: 75-6) and the *New Grove Dictionary of Music* (2001) refer to genre as a class, type or category that helps to organise and finalise our experience. Style on the other hand is the manner or way of presentation. I adopt Pacini-Hernandez's (1995: 16) differentiation of genre and style as the former being a category of music and the latter being a way of making music. As she points out, style or ways of musiking is related to the social context in which music takes place (Pacini-Hernandez 1995:18). There are many different styles within the hunters' music genre in West Africa but only three are well known in Mali among the Mande people that occupy the areas<sup>51</sup> of Segou, Beledougou, Bamako, Jitumu, Bougouni, Wasulu and Manden proper.

Charry (2000: 81) mentions how hunters' pieces from different regions may praise some of the same heroes and how the musical vehicles that carry them are indicators of ethnic identity. Indeed the umbrella term 'Mande people' includes three major ethnic groups that are important in our discussion here. The regions of Segou Beledougou and Jitumu were traditionally occupied by the Bamana people; the regions of Manden proper by the Maninka; and the regions of Bougouni and Wasulu by the Fula people. Today all regions are more mixed than before, and ethnicity has become a more complicated topic, especially in Bamako. Furthermore, the Wasulu area traditionally rests in three different countries: Mali, Guinea and Ivory Coast and the exchange of population has always been strong, especially during troubled times such as civil war and other conflicts. It is safe to say that the three most distinct and popular styles of hunters' music in Mali are:

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<sup>51</sup> I am referring to 'areas' and 'regions' interchangeably as geographical signposts. These areas are part of administrative regions that are too broad to be useful in this context.

- the Segou – Bamana style
- the Simbi – Maninka style and
- the Wasulu – Donsonkoni style

All styles are played for hunters, who do not succumb to ethnic, social or age-grade boundaries, and all are enjoyed by them. The differences between them, apart from the repertoire, lie in the different harps and tunings they are using and sometimes different accompaniments. This makes each style sound distinctive and thus affects their popularity among non-hunters. I shall elaborate upon this below.

### **SEGOU – BAMANA STYLE**

The Bamana donsonkoni (e.g. 2), as it is known, is not popular outside the region of Segou mainly because of the use of language. It is sung in proper Bamanankan and thus many citizens of Bamako have difficulty in understanding. Bamakois are much more familiar with the dialect used in Bamako, which is widely spoken throughout Mali. The music is played on the donsonkoni harp which is very similar to the harp that is used in Wasulu. However, it is said that there are only two rhythms. Moreover, it is perceived as a very conservative style with little improvisation and innovation. The harp has six strings placed in two rows, tuned pentatonically and made out of animal sinew, although I have also seen sets of nylon strings and ones made of threads of rope. The calabash of the harp tends to be bigger than the one in Wasulu and the bamboo neck curvier like a bow. It is played like the kora, with both hands near the base of the neck holding the bamboo handlers. It is accompanied by a fresh bean-shaped karijan. The Bamana donsonkoni ensemble usually has two nkoni players and a karijan player. The music is much more subtle than the Wasulu donsonkoni and the dance is seaweed-like, gracious but low key. The ensemble will mostly play seated with an occasional tour of the performing space.

Although it is very popular in the region with musicians being invited into the local branch of ORTM to perform for the hunters' music radio show, there is no music industry *per se* in Segou. Some recordings that are available, of this style, are exchanged privately through homemade copies of cassettes. In Bamako, people know the Bamana style through the occasional airplay on ORTM and a handful of cassette releases mainly of Batoma Sanogo, the old master from Segou, and Jinaden Zoumana Kanta, a contemporary nkonifola and magician.

### **SIMBI – MANINKA STYLE**

In contrast to the Bamana donsonkoni, which is not discussed at all by Charry (2000), the Maninka style (e.g. 3) gets the most attention. Sung in *Maninkakan* the repertoire of the simbi harp sounds more familiar to the Bamakois but again it is not popular outside the Mande heartland and its surroundings. The simbi has been described by Charry (ibid) and here suffice it to say that it is a 7-string calabash harp, heptatonically tuned and bearing steel strings that make the instrument sound like the modern kora of the jeli musical tradition. The harp is played similarly to the Bamana donsonkoni and the kora, with both hands holding the bamboo holders at the base of the instrument's neck. The music is very melodic and slower than the *Wasulu* donsonkoni, resembling the pace of the Segou style. The dance is equally graceful with the Bamana style, but there are passages where the music gets faster and the dancing can be very much in the style of the *Wasulu* donsonkoni described in Chapter Two. The simbi repertoire is different from the other styles.

As Charry points out, 'the Maninka simbi repertoire is an important source of the music of the jeliw, and it continues to nourish some of the modern music in Mali... [and] on western African music, most likely because of the spread of Maninka culture' (ibid: 63-82). Simbi pieces that had made it to the jeli repertoire are *Kulanjan* and *Janjon* that form 'the oldest layer of the jeli's repertory' (ibid: 83). Simbifolaw (simbi players and singers) form ensembles like the other nkonifolaw in Segou and Wasulu, containing two simbiw and a *karijan* player with the addition of *nkusun*, a gourd rattle, comprised of a small calabash with a handle, with pebbles or grain inside of it. *Nkusun* is used as a percussion instrument.

Simbi music is not very popular outside the Mande heartland, especially in Bamako where it gets limited airplay, and the only popular cassette releases are those recordings made by Bala Guimba Diakite, the blind master musician who trained generations of simbifolaw. At the time of this research the available recordings were limited to just a handful.

### **WASULU – Donsonkoni STYLE**

This is the most popular style of hunters music in Mali (e.g. 1, 3). It is very popular both within the Wasulu region and outside of it. The *Bamakokaw* love it for its quick

rhythms and the stories that are sung with messages and reasons for their popularity discussed in greater detail in Chapter VI. It gets tremendous airplay in Bamako through the national radio (ORTM) and local radio stations. The local music label of Siriman and Modibo Diallo is a dedicated Wasulu hunters' music label with hundreds of releases. There are weekly events of donsonkoni music all over Bamako, sometimes too many for an aficionado to follow. The instruments, rhythms and repertoire of this style are the topic of this thesis and are described and analysed in this chapter.

## **MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS**

Hunters' musical instruments are part of the body of cultural products that hunters make, carry and give meaning to. They are the physical tools with which musicians shape sound. Just as hunters' tunics, hats, trousers and bags<sup>52</sup> are (or should be) made by hunters, instruments may hold amulets inside them and are cherished by the musicians who play them. Here I deal with the instruments used by the musicians who follow the Wasulu style of hunters' music. The only four instruments that the Wasulu hunters' musicians use are the donsonkoni (hunters' harp), the karijan (iron scraper), the kutsuba (a pair of shakers) and the sufle (hunters' whistle). Of the four, the first two are essential but the kutsuba can be absent in a hunters' music ensemble whilst the whistle is an important device for all hunters but it is not necessary in music composition.

### **Donsonkoni**

Charry (1994; 1996) has surveyed string instruments in West Africa in two major articles where he provides a summary of Wachsmann's (1964), Knight's (1973) and DeVale's (1989) articles on African harps and examines the inadequacy of the term "harp lute". When he refers to hunters' harps among the Maninka and Wasulunke people, he calls them calabash harps (Charry 2000) but distinguishes between their original names, simbi for the Maninka harp and donsonkoni for the harp in Wasulu. I adopt DeVale's (1989) term 'spike harp' to refer to the Wasulu donsonkoni.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Cashion (1984) discusses these extensively.

<sup>53</sup> Alternative spellings of the donsonkoni would be donso ngoni and donsogoni.



Donsenkoni is then a spike harp with a big gourd resonator made of calabash; a sound table made of antelope skin;<sup>54</sup> a long bamboo neck that is almost always straight, spikes through the resonator and extends from the bottom end; and a wooden bridge that sits on the sound table and is held by three different wires (one on each side of the resonator: left, right and bottom) dressed in rope. The rectangular bridge holds six nylon strings that are attached to the neck with rings made of rope that function as tuning pegs. At the top of the neck there is a removable metal rattle.



Fig. 7: Apprentices at work: Lansine leading the Bamako delegation during the Kabani ceremony in Kangaba. He is followed by Adama. Next to him in red is Namani Konate (March 2010).

The calabash resonator (*bara*) is carefully selected by the maker of the instrument, who can procure it either in one of the city markets or in the countryside on one of his music or hunting excursions. The top of the calabash is cut away to accommodate the sound table. A rectangular or sometimes circular hole is opened to the left side of the instrument to function as a speaker but it also provides access to the interior of the gourd once the skin has been placed. Called *suda*, death's gate, it will accommodate amulets and payment fees (paper money or coins) for the musician. The resonator can be left as it is with its natural yellow-brown colour or as some musicians prefer, be painted with colours such as green, blue, red or silver.

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<sup>54</sup> *Tragelaphus scriptus* or Kewel (in Wolof language spoken in Senegal) or bushbuck antelope.

The sound table is made of bushbuck (minan) hide (wolo, woro or gwolo), which is soaked in water for a couple of days to regain its elasticity/pliancy and then it is secured by nails or shinny pins on the calabash. The pelt is removed from the skin with a razor blade before the installation of four bamboo dowels (boferen) that pull the skin tightly and prepare it for insertion of the rectangular wooden bridge of the strings. The dowels form a cross just under the skin. Two of them run the calabash from left to right in parallel whilst the other two (also in parallel) run from the bottom up where they meet the neck and are tied together in what is called “little male slave” (jonkɛni). This last pair function as holders. The bond with the bamboo neck symbolises the tight hands of a slave behind his back. According to the Mande people, every man is a slave and by extension a hunters’ musician is a slave too.<sup>55</sup>



Fig. 8: Solo attaching the skin of the antelope on the calabash during nkoni making (March 2010).

The donsonkoni has two ranks of three strings each that run in parallel to each other. The strings (juru) are tuned pentatonically and played by the left and right thumb and left index finger alone. The right thumb plays all three strings of the right rank whilst the left one plays the two upper strings of the left rank, leaving just one string

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<sup>55</sup> All human beings are slaves to Allah, God. Strawn also refers to this metaphor, citing the idea of “folila ye jon ye”, a musician is a slave in the sense that he has to perform for any initiated hunter that invites him regardless of the hunter’s reputation and morality (Strawn 2011: 172-3). This idea of voluntary slavery extends also to the relationship between master musicians and apprentices as I have shown in chapter one. By extension here, it would also seem to refer to the relationship between an instrumentalist and his instrument.



(the highest-pitched one) for the left index finger. The instrument is held with both hands against the musician's abdomen: the right one holds the neck, which rests on the point where the fingers meet the palm; the left one grabs the nkoni's left handle with the three fingers forming a grip around it.



Fig. 9: Solo playing his brand new nkoni in his compound in Bamako (March 2010)

The strings in the past were made of animal parts such as sinews that tended to break frequently and have thus been replaced by nylon strings made out of thick fishing line that are more resistant to weather changes and stay in tune longer than the organic strings. Strawn (2011: 175) argues that this change is due to a more significant element of the spiritual effects of instrumental mishap - uncertainty in hunters' musical performance: a broken string during performance will be interpreted as an omen and curse for a present hunter. He faces a premature death unless he or his brothers provide wild game as ransom to the musician within three days. The ransom can be small game like rabbit, guinea fowl or pheasant. Strawn argues that the switch to more durable synthetic strings is intended to eliminate such danger.

The wooden rectangular bridge is called "horse" (so) and the wire holders are called sosigilan (the side ones) and sokojuru (the back one). The strings are fitted by individual knots and go through the one-centimeter-thick bridge all the way to the neck where they are tightened to individual thin ropes that encircle the neck several times before they are knotted again to form the tuning rings. The whole construction adds to the transmission of the vibration to the resonator and thus the production of sound. The

strings are tied one by one beginning with the shortest one, which is tied closest to the resonator and the longest one closer to the rattler at the end of the neck.

The metal rattler at the end of the harp's neck is called *sege-sege*. It is made of a thin sheet of metal in rectangular or 'point of an arrow' shape and many metal rings hang from holes in its perimeter. According to Male (1999: 309), its function is to increase the musicality of the instrument. It creates a sympathetic buzzing sound<sup>56</sup> when the strings of the instrument are struck. Musicians also generate this buzz when they strike the neck of the harp with a large ring they wear on the finger of their right hand. Solo wore such a ring only in performances as part of his regalia. It is inscribed with what appear to be glyphs of scripture and it is considered part of the amulet weaponry of a donsonkonifola.

### **Karijan, Kutsuba AND Sufle**

Karijan or *nege*<sup>57</sup> is the metal scraper that is used as a rhythmic accompaniment for the donsonkoni. It is made from a metal tube that is split all the way down one side. Along both sides of that split, small ridges are formed with a saw. A ring attaches to the opposite side of the split and functions as a folder for the instrumentalist to handle the scraper. It is about three centimeters in diameter and is also made of metal. The length and weight of the scrapers vary but the average length appears to be roughly between 10-12 inches long and weight about 500 grams. I have seen smaller and lighter scrapers made of thinner tubes, but their sound was somewhat weak and disappointing to the hunters. The instrument is made by blacksmiths (*numu*) who have the means to control the *pama* of the iron (see McNaughton 1988). Solo, who is familiar with the practices of *numuya*, the art of the blacksmiths, manufactured small iron parts of the donsonkoni like the *sege-sege* but appointed a blacksmith, as more appropriate and knowledgeable artisan, to make our ensemble's *karijanw*.

The *nege* is held with the left hand by the ring and is scraped with an iron rod that the player holds with the right hand. The rod is scraped against the split with the ridges and produces a sweet, distinctive and loud sound. There is only one rhythm

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<sup>56</sup> A number of ethnomusicologists have written on the aesthetics of the 'buzz' in African music, from Chernoff in *African Rhythms and Sensibilities* to James Koetting in his Chapter on West African music in the 1984 full edition of Titon et al edited *Worlds of Music* to Portia Maultsby in 'Africanism in African-American Music' and, I believe, David Coplan in *Of Cannibals and Kings*.

<sup>57</sup> Strawn offers alternative names for the scrapper: *jerejen*, *nkerejen*, and *narija*.

played on the *nɛɛ* that comprises of three strokes: a strike-pull, followed by a push and then another pull that result at a lift of the rod. A small pause links the cycles of the rhythm.<sup>58</sup>



Fig. 10: Karijian or *nɛɛ*: the iron scraper.

The *karijan* is played by apprentices and up to two may accompany the lead and rhythm *nkoni* players. Master musicians never play the scraper in formal ceremonies and events, although I have seen a master musician, Toba Seydou Traore, grabbing the *nɛɛ* and accompanying one of his apprentices in a cheerful way, making jokes and encouraging other apprentices to sing and clap during a sound rehearsal for a wedding celebration on site. This was, though, an informal occasion and apart from that I never witnessed a master to do the same. Master musicians spend years playing the *nɛɛ* as apprentices and it is regarded that they have paid their dues to the modest instrument. As masters, they have moved on to the ‘real art’ of *nkoni* playing and singing for hunters.

Hunters may also accompany musicians, mostly apprentices, by playing the *nɛɛ*. Many of my hunter-brothers accompanied us during hunter gatherings, such as the *simbonsi* (post-funerary anniversary for deceased hunters). Uninitiated boys and teenagers, too, may accompany apprentices and master musicians in formal settings and

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<sup>58</sup> Strawn points out that the three-stroke rhythm bears the onomatopoeic reference pronounced *cekeye* or *kekenyen*.



ceremonies, as long as these are for entertainment only and open to the public. Women may play the *karijan* as well. When a master hunter lacks any apprentices he may give that role to his wife or fiancée as in the case of Solo Konate or Seydou Camara. Thus, the *nege* is not reserved for initiated hunters only, as in the case of the *donsonkoni*. In fact, many people and youth know how to play the *nege*'s rhythm and also dance to it in public events. A number of times we were asked to pass one of our scrapers to someone who wanted to accompany the ensemble, a fact that shows how people resonate with this type of music and how popular it is.

The *kutsuba* is a set of two bell-shaped basket shakers made of bamboo. They have a metal bottom and a ring handle covered with rubber strips. They contain pebbles or bottle caps and add a third layer of sound texture to the music. There are about five different rhythms that experienced musicians play on this instrument. They play them from the ring-holders with their bottom facing the ground and shake them vertically in either sharp or more loose movements producing two different sounds emphasising the duple or triple rhythmic qualities of the harp.



Fig. 11: Brulay Sidibe doing acrobatics with his *kutsuba* (shakers) during a public event in Hamdallaye, Bamako. Much loved by the audiences, Brulay's moves and dance were cheered everywhere (December 2010).

Not all the ensembles have a *kutsuba* player. The instrument is not considered as essential as the *karijan* in the hunters' performance context but the addition to the ensemble is welcoming. Our ensemble had a particularly skilled and experienced

kutsuba player, Brulay Sidibe from Wasulu, an old man with high spirits and an incredible technique that extended to acrobatics. He would joke, pantomime and call upon the audience to cheer every time we performed. In his youth, he served as a kutsuba player for Seydou Camara. As in the case of *karipan*, the instrument is much loved by the public and many teenagers wanted to play it during our performances. But Brulay would not let them mess with his instruments, teasing them, and driving them away before laughing out loud and welcoming them back to the site.

The hunters' whistle, *sufle* or *donso fle*, is an indispensable part of the hunters' arsenal. It is usually carved from wood, although I have seen metal ones with heavy ornamentation. The common whistles are cylindrical with one or two openings that usually produce two sounds. Hunters use the whistle to call for help and as they say "one blow in the bush is not good news", implying that when there is no response from a fellow hunter, and that the person in need will have to face the danger and disaster on his own. Hunters in attendance very often blow their whistles in musical performance. Likewise, musicians might do so too. The sound of the whistle is captured in numerous live recordings that have made it into local production and I consider them part of the hunters' aesthetics: a unique and characteristic sound associated with hunters' lore alone.

## **TUNINGS AND PLAYING**

All tunings of the six-stringed *donsokoni* are pentatonic but vary according to the range of the performer's singing voice. Every musician therefore tunes his *nkoni* according to his individual needs. Solo was very aware of his voice's tonal range and always tuned his instrument with the highest-pitched string being F#3 in the contemporary EuroAmerican pitch notation system.<sup>59</sup> His *nkoni* then has a tuning beginning with the lowest-pitched string and moving to the highest of F#2, G#2, B2, C#3, E3, F#3 or, using the numbers of solfege, 1, 2, 4, 5, b7 (or flat-7), 8.<sup>60</sup> The pitch of

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<sup>59</sup> In this system A4 is standardised to 440 Hz, lying in the octave containing notes from C4 (middle C) to B4. The lowest note on most pianos is A0, the highest C8. The numbers in this system correspond to the eight octaves of the grand piano. Each number represents the location of the octave i.e. 1 refers to notes sounded within the lowest octave on the piano; 2 to notes played within the next octave, etc.

<sup>60</sup> Solo's account confirms Strawn's findings about tunings (2011: 179) although Yoro Sidibe tunes his instrument a semitone lower: F2, G2, Bb2, C3, Eb3, F3. He mentions that Yoro along with other players, sometimes raise the pitch of scale degree 4 roughly a semitone (Bb2 to B2) or scale degree b7 to 7 (Eb3 to E3): F2, G2, B2, C3, E3, F3 or 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8.

the strings alternates between the two ranks of three strings each, starting with the lowest on the right-hand side and moving to the lowest of the left-hand side, then the middle string at the right-hand side followed by the middle string at the left-hand side and finally the highest on the right-hand side and the highest on the left-hand side.

The strings have names and come in pairs: the lowest sounding pair is called the ‘mother strings’. Each string is separately named as the “right-hand mother string” (kininbolobajuru) and the “left-hand mother string” (namanbolobajuru). The middle strings ditto are called, respectively, “right-hand row” (kininbolosangwan) and “left-hand row” (namanbolosangwan). The last pair of strings are considered to be the “children” and called, respectively, “right-hand child” (kininboloden) and “left-hand child” (namanboloden). The six strings refer to six maternal brothers whose speech (kuma) is the sound of the nkoni (badenman ce wooro kumakan) and symbolises the social solidarity exemplified by hunters’ musicians within the association and society in general (Strawn 2011).<sup>61</sup>

In performance, master musicians and apprentices play seated, as well as walking around and dancing in the arena. When seated, the musicians keep the gourd between their thighs, with the left hand close to the bridge and the right hand supporting the neck of the instrument. The palms of both hands run parallel to the two ranks of strings. The playing technique is complicated and difficult to master. It is easy to pluck the strings but the desired sound will not be produced without many long hours of practice, imitation and performance. The technique involves ‘hitting’ the open strings or dampening them with the palm of the hands in many different ways to produce equal sound colours. By ‘hitting’, hunters mean a movement of the thumb downwards and outwards at the same time. If the string is struck in just one of the two directions, the sound will be too weak and not to the taste of hunters. Playing western string instruments like guitar certainly did not help me understand this technique immediately, but at the end I was able to raise a few eyebrows in surprise and contentment from hunters.

The deep bass resonating sound along with the sympathetic buzzing of the  $\text{sege sege}$  make a vivid impression upon audiences and hunters who are very proud of

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<sup>61</sup> Salia Male (1999: 303-12) gives slightly different names for the strings: ba (mother), basina (co-wife), sangwan flana and sangwan (second and first sangwan), den flana and den (second and first child) and connects it symbolically with familial and social rapports. This is expected since his consultants were different from the artistic lineage of Yoro Sidibe with which both Cullen and me worked with.



their music. The musicians eventually stand up from their stools in order to tour the arena and call hunters to dance through praise-song. The nkoni players will carry their instruments in their hands, most of them passing the left hand under a short strap of cloth. This way the left forearm supports the bulk of the instrument's weight. There are other ways to 'wear' the harp, with a neck strap, for example, like many kamalen nkoni players, or a shoulder strap, like guitarists, but all musicians I talked to prefer the forearm strap as it allows them to take it off easily when seated and rest their arm for a while.

Despite the fact that donsonkoni should be played with the right hand on the neck and the left hand on the bridge, as the "proper" and only acceptable and orthodox way, many left-handed musicians do not adapt to right-handed playing and reverse the tuning of the strings to accommodate the left-hand. Solo did not approve of this but he did not say anything more on the matter.

### **AESTHETICS AND SYMBOLISM**

The donsonkoni is distinct from the other West African harps (for example the Maninka simbi and kora) because of its low frequency sound (Charry 2000), which Strawn (2011) calls 'resonant bass'. Hunters and musicians alike refer to the 'noise' or 'big noise' (mankan or mankanba) of the instrument<sup>62</sup>. The musician is expected to 'hit' the strings in order to produce a big, strong and resonant sound. In this section, I discuss the aesthetic framework that relates to the production of a desirable tone of the donsonkoni and its function.

Low frequencies in general, are omnidirectional, and can be heard from any point in the performance space no matter where the performers are situated in space at any given moment. In some villages in the countryside I was able to hear such non-electronically mediated acoustic set-ups, which I found much more captivating than most performances held in Bamako, where usually low-quality sound systems distort and dominate both the sound of the instrument and the singing voice. The bass sound of the harp and the deep resonance (*waa*) are achieved by the right selection of the calabash and type of the animal skin. Where there is a lack of wild game, the maker may use the skin of a goat (*ba*) but never sheep or other domestic animals. Hunters

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<sup>62</sup> Strawn offers alternative terms for this: *kan kunmaba* and the French derived *son* that respectively mean tongue/language, (big) speech and sound.

believe that a harp with a skin of domestic animal is not a hunters' harp. Hunters' harps originated from spirits of the bush<sup>63</sup> and carry varying degrees of *nama*, the dangerous vital force that all living beings possess.

In addition to the better sound of the antelope skin and the deeper sound that it produces, the tension of the strings is very important. Loose strings can have a lower sound but are not resonant enough, whilst very tight strings can be firmer in forceful playing but reduce resonance by putting too much tension on the sound table causing distortion of its surface and premature ageing. Solo would stock antelope skins in his hunting room and continuously ask for hunters to bring some more. As a very talented *nkoni* maker, he was sought after often and wanted to have the necessary materials in order to meet the needs of his clientele. He used to say that a *nkoni* with anything but *minan* hide is a youth's harp (*kamalen nkoni*) and not a *donsonkoni*.

For hunters, the *suda*, ('death's gate', or 'mouth of the healer') is the point of exchange of secret knowledge in healing and sorcery, which both gives and receives the musical sounds. The gourd's opening is the instrument of memories (Male 1999: 307) and constitutes a form of spiritual sustenance for the listener. Repeatedly, my consultants would indicate a natural phenomenon, like the manifestation of a whirlwind after playing the *donsonkoni* during a *simboni* sacred performance as a sign of neutralisation of *nama*, the vital force of dead animals, which were killed by the deceased hunter during his hunting life. As indicated above, the strings of the harp have names that correspond to their length. This way, the shortest and high-pitched strings are the *denjuru*, the children's strings, the new blood in a family. The middle set of strings symbolises the youth and the adults. Their name, *sangwan*, denotes a fallow field and they provide a connection between the high-pitched and lower-pitched set of strings. These last ones are the 'mother strings'; the wife and the co-wife. The mother string and the child string are both in total harmony since they are a perfect octave apart. The six strings bring the familial and social values of mother/child, master/student, older/younger to the fore, reflecting Mande traditional societies.

The iron rattler has a symbolism much more specific to hunters and hunting. According to Strawn (2011: 176) the *sege-sege* 'references the practice of investigating thoroughly the ground upon which game is struck with ammunition [... and] by

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<sup>63</sup> Strawn gives the story of Koifolo, the first hunter who stole a 140 string harp from Gwedenke, a cave-dwelling bush spirit to give to the hunters (Strawn 2011: 182).

extension means both to understand through observation and to explicate.’ In performance, when the master musician places the neck of his harp on the left shoulder of a hunter, he positions the rattler close to his ear to remind the hunter that he is looking after him ‘in the face of the unknown’ (Strawn *ibid*). The buzzing sound is a shared aesthetic around the African continent in general and West African countries in particular. Among the Mande people, it is present in different musical genres from music of the *jeliw* (balafon or xylophone), *donsow* (donsonkoni, *simbi* or hunters’ harp) and drum ensembles (*jembe* drum). As I was informed by a *komotigi*, a blacksmith priest/leader of the *komo* secret society and a hunter himself, the buzzing sound of the *jembe* drum in *komo* ceremonies helps mask the incantations and sacred texts from the ears of the non-initiates. Like a curtain, the buzz separates brothers in an association from common people making sure that the secret knowledge of the members stays within the association.<sup>64</sup>

The iron scraper is a much more common instrument, not particular to hunters’ music and is only connected to the blacksmiths because of its construction material. Iron contains *nama* and the blacksmiths are the only men capable to manage this (McNaughton 1988). The *sufle* or hunters’ whistle is much more significant. It is the hunter’s call for help in the bush (Cashion 1984) and symbolises, partnership, brotherhood and camaraderie. It is a symbol of unity and affiliation in the hunters’ society. A blow inquires after a response just like a question seeks for an answer or a request for action. Let me now turn to the protagonists of this music; the master musicians and their ensembles and discuss their role in the music scene and performance.

## **THE REPERTOIRE: A DYNAMIC TRADITION**

Wasulu hunters’ music includes three different sections: *donkili* or song (call to dance), *fasa* or praise, and *maana* or narrative/story. Not all of them are necessarily present in performance. The *maanaw*, for example, are reserved for special occasions after long performances for entertainment or in funerals and post-funerary anniversaries. During the narration of stories, the audience, who may be composed of hunters only or hunters mixed with members of the public, need to sit down, relax, be quiet and pay attention to

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<sup>64</sup> McNaughton (1988; 1992; 1995) writes about the Mande blacksmiths and their relation to the *komo* secret society.

the singer who would narrate the story with the accompaniment of his harp. The ensemble usually remains quiet. Stories, as Jackson puts it, ‘like the music and dance that in many societies accompanies the telling of stories, are a kind of theatre where we collaborate in reinventing ourselves and authorising notions, both individual and collective, of who we are’ (Jackson 2002: 16). Storytelling provides strategies and generates experiences that ‘help people redress imbalances and correct perceived injustices in the distribution of Being, so that in telling a story with others one reclaims some sense of agency, recovers some sense of purpose, and comes to feel that the events that overwhelmed one from without may be brought within one's grasp’ (ibid: 36). As described by Cashion (1984), the stories form part of the hunters’ epics where the singer alternates narration and song to engage the audience and enrich the narrative with sound. The performer improvises on the nkoni and introduces songs that have different melodic patterns<sup>65</sup> called *nkonisenw* (pl. the leg of the harp). *Kuma* (speech) on the other hand corresponds to what the singer sings or narrates and defines his skill as performer. Of a good *nkonifola* hunters say ‘he can truly speak!’ These are then the raw materials with which a hunters’ musician can shape his repertoire: *nkoni* riffs and words.

It is impossible to say how many different *nkonisenw* (or even songs) exist in the Wasulu hunters’ repertoire as this would require extensive fieldwork throughout the area that spans across the borders of southern Mali, northern Ivory Coast and north-east Guinea. It would require working with and documenting the repertoire of every single *nkonifola*; as well as cataloguing then comparing these findings with already-recorded music, not only for today’s music market but also with the sound recordings of the National Radio, which are now in the ORTM archives. It would also involve archival research in France, among recordings made during the colonial period for researchers, folklorists and museum collections such as the *Musee de l’homme* in Paris. At the time of this research, for example, Solo’s repertoire consisted of forty-nine *donsonkoni jurusen* (hunters’ harp rhythms). Forty-five of these are classic riffs that have either remained relatively unchanged or have been ‘modernised’, while four of them are Solo’s new and original creations.

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<sup>65</sup> Charry (2000: 80) uses this term while Strawn (2011) calls them ‘cyclical melodic string rhythms.’ I refer to them as rhythms, riffs, *nkoni* riffs or *nkonisenw*. Another frequently used term to describe the riff or rhythm, is *jurusen* (lit. “the leg of the string”). This is used for all string instruments (including the hunters’ harp).

I was told that very few nkonisenw were available to the musicians until the 1950s. Hunters recall ceremonies and events where just one nkoni riff would be played all night long. Its name is Sirabakelen (e.g. 5) or ‘the first, the only path,’ referring to the way of donsoya. It is a short riff with a fundamental meaning for all nkonifolaw. Many songs are played with this riff as an accompaniment, and it is the first riff that apprentices learn to master on the nkoni. It is not clear when or how the repertoire expanded to include more riffs and new songs sung for hunters, in general, or for certain individuals, in particular. As Strawn (2011) mentions, nkonifolaw would sing and dedicate a new song to an individual who had shown extraordinary skill in hunting and which would then be appropriated and generalised later on to apply toward other hunters with similar achievements.

It is possible that the proliferation of new riffs began with the improvisation around the original Sirabakelen. Solo would say that there are ‘so many different versions of it as many nkonifolaw!’ He could play many versions himself: he regarded Toumani Kone’s version of this riff as ‘a must know’ for every student but preferred Yoro’s. As he explained, a nkonifola must be aware of all different versions and be able to play them. He learned this from his teacher and passes it on to his students. Every nkonisen has a fixed cyclical melodic pattern played on the strings of the harp that musicians and connoisseurs alike call iritimu or ritim, referring to the word ‘rhythm’ in French. However, each rhythm also has a number of variations that the lead player can throw in at any given moment, especially when he is not singing. While the lead player explores variations, what I might call ‘the rhythm nkoni player’ within an ensemble will continue playing the same, original rhythmic pattern or nkonisen. These variations are referred to as zigzag or ka juru ka cero tige, probably because playing them involves a lot of skilful alternation of fingering between the two rows of strings and hitting them in a fast but clear way.

## **CREATIVITY**

‘Donsonkoni is all about creativity!’ Solo used to say. Each musician will create his own zigzag versions of nkonisew. Musicians will also modernise the original riffs and incorporate them in their own repertoires. Ntana (e.g. 9) is probably one of the very few nkonisenw (rhythms) that has remained in its original form. There are ‘just a couple’ of modern variations of it which are the same as the initial version. Musicians may also

appropriate riffs from other local folk string instruments like the bolon or the dan, or other contexts such as the komo secret society repertoire to create new donsonkoni rhythms. Solo, for example, used the komofoli (music for the komo initiate) rhythm to compose somajuru, (string of the soma), the riff of his song ‘Ŋanaw’ (e.g. 1). Solo also created the rhythm called ginginjuru (string of the gingin bird) after the sounds produced by a predator bird called gingin.<sup>66</sup> This bird makes a deep coughing sound, which Solo incorporated into the riff using the two bass strings.

One of Solo’s latest creations is a song called ‘Mustapha Diallo Jine Be Teri Fε’ (Mustapha Diallo is a friend of the jinn) with an interesting story: One day Mustapha called him because he had purchased a new SUV, the enormous model ‘Hummer H2’. Solo started to think about a song for the occasion. He first created the words and then took out the nkoni to accompany the song and it worked. He created thus the riff and named it: jine be teri fε (bush spirit’s friend). Another such example is that of the song ‘Sεge Tε Kasidonon Ta’ whose riff is nganajuru. Sεge is another predator bird and kasidonon is the adult cock, the one who can sing.<sup>67</sup> The song translates as ‘the sεge bird does not hunt the adult cock, just the little ones’. It is possible to create a song with an existing rhythm, but Solo prefers new nkonisenw and the producers, according to Solo, always ask for new songs.

Despite this tendency toward novelty, Solo is an advocate of the old ways: the students should learn the old riffs, jurukorow, first.<sup>68</sup> There are not many younger contemporary musicians who can play the old riffs. It is only the older generation who can play them and the well-trained students of great masters such as Yoro and those masters from his lineage, like Solo. Solo insists that his students learn the old true riffs of donsonkoni. On the other hand, to use his own words, it is very important for him to ‘evolve’ as a musician so he thinks a lot about ‘modernisation’. Sometimes he combines two songs from different nkonifolaw. An example of that would be his own take on a Toumani Kone song called ‘Mogo Tε Diya Bε’. Solo based his new riff on a song of

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<sup>66</sup> *Lybius dubius*, African Bearded Barbet.

<sup>67</sup> Birds, like all animals ‘cry’ (kasi) they do not sing or howl, roar etc.

<sup>68</sup> Christopher Waterman, in *Juju*, also discusses the aesthetic emphasis on novelty within the musical traditions and popular music he discusses, and emphasis that is balanced, particularly in the older genres, by a value placed on the ‘lineage’ of tradition.

Madu 'Kuruni' Diarra called 'Mariba Yassa' which is based on the fetish of the same name.

Nkonifolaw are usually inspired by successful donsow and compose songs for them, using either existing riffs or creating new ones. They may name the song after the riff or vice versa. Nkonisenw then, may carry separate names from songs but can also give their names to songs that may become popular, or be appropriated and changed by other musicians only to transform into different songs which in turn would be attributed to these new artists. Songs may also take names of nkonisenw, especially older ones such as marasa or ntana (e.g. 7-9). Bards will sing new texts and will dedicate them to contemporary hunters of exceptional skills.

The creation of new songs is important since the popularity of donsonkoni has increased. Audience members want to be able to dance to the music. Some of the classic riffs or rhythms are suitable for larger audiences to dance to and not just members of the hunters' brotherhoods. Rhythms which are suitable for women to dance to, for example, are kambili (the name of a hunter) and kunfε ko (uncertainty). The latter was appropriated by Oumou Sangare for her song 'Ko Bεε Kunfε Ko Ye', 'all things are uncertain'. The old hunters' rhythms are reserved for hunters only. It is characteristic that in the old days when the marasa rhythm was played, only the great hunters could dance to it. The donsonkonifolaw were not even allowed to dance or move around so they played seated.

According to Solo there are many creative options for a donsonkonifola. He can:

- a. Add a new text to an old nkonisen
- b. Add a new text to a modern version of an old nkonisen
- c. Add a new text to a new nkonisen
- d. Add an old text to a new nkonisen, or
- e. Add an old text to a modern version of an old nkonisen.

In every case he is credited with having composed a 'new song'. A number of times, when Solo tried a new riff, the students started to sing an old chorus text of which the new riff reminded them. Particular sequences of plucked/hit strings would thus correspond to remembered song texts. Many names of nkonisen come from singing parts because that is what the riffs say, much like talking drums. That might be the reason why the verb fɔ (to say) is used to indicate 'playing' an instrument, be it nkoni,

jembe, dunun, nɛgɛ, simbi etc. And maybe that is why hunters' musicians and hunters refer to the musical phrases as iritimu, rhythms. The Bamanankan word is jurusen, meaning the 'leg of the string'. The suffix –sen (leg) is used for percussion rhythms too.

Solo has also created 'A Tɛ Jigin So Nama Do Faga', by incorporating an old text to a modern version of an old riff. He has also composed totally new riffs and song texts. Kontron fasa (a praise to the fetish Kontron) is a quick version of jonmansa. He pointed out that Sirabakelen, a rhythm played by all nkonifolaw of the Toumani Kone generation, was set to the modern Siraba because of a changing preference for faster rhythms reflected in the contemporary version (e.g. 5-6). Before that generation of nkonifolaw there were very few bards, and hunters' music was feared and was not popular at all. After Toumani Kone started composing, hunters' music became more and more popular and people began dancing to it. Everyone can dance to the siraba rhythm thus creating a demand for faster music, which resulted in Yoro simplifying the original rhythm so it could be played and sound properly, otherwise it was a 'mass of noise'.

### **AESTHETIC TRAITS AND COMPETENCE OF A COMPOSER**

All the musicians I know compose their own songs or want to reach the level of knowledge that will permit them to compose their own songs. It is believed that a composer has to be a skilled master with a lot of experience in the trade. Hunters are very harsh judges of all things, including music and song. They are open to novelty such as new songs and nkonisew as long as they fit into the wider idea of donsoya, the hunters' ideology and ethos. If the composer is skilled and 'speaks' the right words in the song, then the hunters will embrace it and the artist will gain fame and honour that will lead to a wider popularity among Malians. He will teach his students how to play the song and they may include it in their repertoire when they graduate and become masters in their own right. Other musicians may appropriate his song. Some of my consultants spoke about 'stealing the song'. Hence their hesitation to perform new songs before they have been recorded in the studio and released in cassette or compact disc albums. Solo would be very secretive about his compositions. He would reveal and teach me some of his nkonisenw that his other students had never heard of let alone played. On one special occasion, he decided to play a new song in public that he had composed for a renowned soma. I did not know the song and neither did the rest of his students who had to cope with a totally new and very complex riff with unfortunate



results: Solo ended up playing and singing the song on his own with just the accompaniment of the *nɛɛ* and no chorus.

## **SONGS**

Wasulu hunters' songs are relatively short in duration (but they can be prolonged by improvisation) and are based on call and response patterns. The singer may improvise verses during performance according to the occasion and refer to a specific group of hunters or a certain individual: a host, an honoured guest, a family member, a hunter, a dedicated fan of *donsow* and *donsoya*, a sorcerer or a hunter's spouse. The chorus, formed by the master's students will respond to the call of their teacher with short phrases that illuminate, underline or exemplify the meaning of the words sung by the master. Singer and chorus repeat the refrain a number of times throughout the song.

Hunters distinguish between hunting songs and songs for entertainment but also songs for special occasions like funerals and post-funerary anniversaries, and other rituals. Here I examine only a limited number of songs listed under four categories: entertainment songs, hunting songs, wider theme songs and death songs. These are my own divisions made to facilitate the discussion.

### **ENTERTAINMENT SONGS**

A typical example here would be the canonical song 'Na Ka Tulon Ke' that is played at the beginning of celebration ceremonies and has *siraba* as its *nkonisen* (**L** stands for lead singer and **C** for chorus and **T** for translation):<sup>69</sup>

**L:** Na ka tulon ke. Mɔɔɔya ye tulon ye.

**T:** Come and enjoy. Personhood is enjoyment.

**C:** Mɔɔɔ tɛ dia bɛɛ ye.

**T:** Not all people are happy

**L:** Na ka tulon ke mɔɔɔ tɛ ban tulon ma.

**T:** Come and enjoy no one is banned from enjoyment

**C:** Mɔɔɔ tɛ dia bɛɛ ye.

**T:** Not all people are happy

**L:** Donso tulon ke mɔɔɔ tɛ ban tulon ma. Mɔɔɔ tɛ dia bɛɛ ye.

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<sup>69</sup> Translations are my own, developed through research with my consultants.

**T:** In a hunter's celebration, none is banned from enjoyment. Not all people are happy

**C:** Na ka tulon ke mogo te ban tulon ma.

**T:** Come and enjoy no one is banned from enjoyment

**L:** Mogo te dia bee ye.

**T:** Not all people are happy

**C:** Donso tulon ke mogo te ban tulon ma. Mogo te dia bee ye.

**T:** In a hunter's celebration, none is banned from enjoyment Not all people are happy

Both singer and chorus emphasise in alternating phrases that everybody (hunters and non-hunters) is welcome in this hunters' event. It is a celebration for a hunter and a call for the people to enjoy themselves; all people have the right to enjoy, even the unhappy ones. There are other songs with similar characteristics that singers perform at the beginning of events or in the middle to stir up things a bit and entertain the crowd. Solo sang the following song after a long wait for his turn to sing in a public event in the Manden, where other simbi players were invited to perform. It was late at night, around 02:00am, and he was frustrated. We had spent the whole day performing for the hunters in a post-funerary anniversary and took our seat next to the other musicians for the evening entertainment at around 09:00pm. Solo had played one song at the beginning and then stepped down for the simbifolaw to play a couple of songs, as the protocol requires, but some people were delaying the process and nobody was playing any music. When his time came after waiting for four hours, Solo sang 'Sijenakononi' based on the siraba nkonisen:

**L:** Si jena kononi kasi kan.

**T:** The little night-vision bird is crying (singing)

**C:** Su mana ko dugu se be je.

**T:** From dusk till dawn

**L:** Men jenekononi kasi kan. Su mana dugu se be je.

**T:** The little night-vision bird is crying (singing). From dusk till dawn

**C:** Si jena kononi kasi kan.

**T:** The little night-vision bird is crying (singing)

**L:** Su mana ko dugu se be je.

**T:** From dusk till dawn

**C:** Mɛn jɛna kɔnɔni kasi kan. Su mana dugu se bɛ jɛ.

**T:** The little night-vision bird is crying (singing). From dusk till dawn

The general purpose of this song is to notify people about the evening event: The singer is coming to sing for you; the bard is in town and he will sing for you from sunset until sunrise. Solo reminded the people and especially the ones who were delaying the concert that he was there to entertain the crowd. At the same time, he reminded them of the difficult job he and every nkonifola has to do in singing for hours on end for the audience. Solo asserted his status as master musician without being offensive and was rewarded with additional time to perform. All the hunters approved of his performance and the concert continued without further disruptions. Other similar entertainment songs include ‘Tulon Na Wulilen’ with its somafoli (e.g. 18) riff that orders everyone to keep silent because the hunters’ celebration has begun, or ‘Aw ni Wula Den’ with the same riff that welcomes the young men to the event, or ‘Donsonkoni Wuli’ sang on top of the siraba rhythm that denotes that hunters’ music is present on site.

### **HUNTING SONGS**

Apart from songs for pure entertainment such as the above, other songs refer to hunters and the art of hunting. ‘Ne Tolo Mugukan Na’ based on the kutigɛfoli (lit., “cutting the tail music” e.g. 10) rhythm talks about the sound of the gunpowder in the bush; ‘Donsow Y’a Ntalankan Ye’ refers to brave hunters who can dance the ntana,<sup>70</sup> the nkonisen that is based on; while ‘Karamɔɔ Na Faga Donko La’ has the danjuguni rhythm, touches on and evokes master hunters and sorcerers as knowledge holders and tamers of darkness and uncertainty. Another song, ‘A Ye ɲima ɲaninnba’ talks about the distress and atrocity in life as noted in its first line:

A ye ɲima ɲaninba, mɔɔɔya ye ɲani caman ye  
Suffering, humanness is suffering.

It is not just the hunters who suffer; it is the whole world, especially in times of great uncertainty and peril. The nkonifola sing this slow, almost ballad-like piece, over the Siraba rhythm.

Hunters’ songs can also be satirical. One example of this is ‘Nkolinin Kelen Faga’. Based on the popular siraba rhythm, ‘Nkolinin’ is a joking song to poke fun at a

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<sup>70</sup> Ntana has also alternative spellings like Ntanan and Ntalan.

worthless or incapable hunter or to ‘sabotage a bad hunter’. Nkolonin is a little antelope<sup>71</sup> that hunters do not normally kill:

Nkolonin kelen faga  
Only one small antelope killed  
Donsokε ni mana nkolonin kelen faga  
This hunter killed this small antelope  
O yεε tε ban  
That does not stop laughter!

Such joking songs can also function as a form of critique, satire or even undermine a hunter. A displeased nkonifola will challenge a hunter, forcing him into making a promise to provide meat. A small and worthless animal like nkolonin cannot be a trophy to a hunter who is asked to present the nkonifola with big, dangerous or wicked beasts of the bush. Yet, hunters are not the only recipients of songs.

### **WIDER THEME SONGS**

The song ‘Jɔn Mansa’, with its rhythm by the same name (e.g. 15), is sung to honour great men (Jɔn is slave or human and Mansa is emperor), men of power, governors, politicians, army officers, even powerful merchants and to remind them that they have a responsibility to humanity and the community as a characteristic verse implies:

Ni jɔn mansa, ko bεε juru b’l la  
Master, you have an obligation

The word juru, apart from string, means obligation, fine, ransom. The person with ‘a string attached’ (juru b’l la) to him is in debt, owes someone. In this case he has a debt to the community. He is the one who can provide and fulfil the need of others, the need of the weak.

### **DEATH SONGS**

Funerary songs or ‘death songs’ form another category. They are sung in special ceremonies, like the kungsi or simbonisi anniversaries, and are not usually recorded or

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<sup>71</sup> *Ourebia ourebi*. Oribi antelope. Small, slender, long-necked antelope found in grassland almost everywhere in sub-Saharan Africa.

released in cassettes and compact discs, and are meant to honour the deceased hunter. One such song is ‘Nghanakɔɔdonfoli’ (Nghanakoro’s song; e.g. 17). The chorus starts and the lead singer answers with the nkoni playing:

**C:** A e a e ah. Ah a a a ah. Nin ye Nghanakɔɔdonfoli ye.

**L:** Mmmmm

**C:** A e a e ah. Ah a a a ah. Nin ye Nghanakɔɔdonfoli ye.

**L:** Ah a a a ah.

**C:** A e a e ah. Ah a a a ah. Nin ye Nghanakɔɔdonfoli ye.

**L:** Nin ye Nghanakɔɔdonfoli ye.

**T:** This is Nghanakoro’s song.

The lead singer will recite all the dead hunters that came before the deceased and will eventually sing that the hunter he is praising did not show up in this great meeting, thereby having implying that he must be dead:

X donfoli ye

This is X’s song

Fura tɛ saya la

There is no cure for death

I ma siran fana I bɛ sa

Even if you are fearless, you will die

Fura tɛ saya la

There is no cure for death

Don se baliya ko

The day of death comes

Su sera donso baro la

The night has fallen and the hunter speaks

Donbaliya o ye dibi ye

Ignorance is darkness

Dije man kɛnɛ.

The world is unwell.

Death anniversaries are held to expel the very last dark forces of *nyama* that the deceased hunter unleashed by the killing of wild animals and spirits during his lifetime. They are held years after his death, are organised by his family, and sponsored by close family and friends. Their duration varies from region to region and some are more elaborate than others depending upon the financial input available, but it is safe to say that contemporary *kunsi* or *simbinsi*, last for a considerably shorter period today than in the past. Previous authors and my consultants, both mentioned week-long ceremonies in the past decades namely the 1970s and 80s, while I have only witnessed day-long rituals and on one occasion, a half-day ceremony. They are followed by a public event where all the guests and neighbourhood participate and music is played until late at night. When people get tired and retire to their homes and beds some hunters and civilians may stay longer and demand more. That is the time for more discrete and quiet playing without dancing, and may include the recitation of hunters' stories.

## **HUNTING STORIES AND POWERFUL WORDS**

Many North American, European and Malian scholars have collected and analysed Mande hunters' epic stories, as I have indicated in the introduction and literature review of this thesis. While details of all the hunters' epics and further analysis of their meanings are beyond the scope of this dissertation, I focus here on the narrative structure of some key phrases that Solo uses in his songs and story telling.

Hunters' epics consist of narrative (*maana*) and songs (*donkili*) in succession. The *nkonifola* may perform on his own or with his ensemble (or part of it). He can start with a song or go straight to the narrative, which then alternates at key moments with the introduction of another song to keep the interest and suspense going. The hunters' stories are part of an oral tradition and vary from region to region with slightly different versions sung by different artists. What is striking today is that old stories that used to last hours on end, like 'Kambili' by Seydou Camara (five days of roughly six hours of performance per day) now are performed for twenty minutes to an hour. Cassettes that document *donso maana* show this. The longest stories fit in a two-volume cassette (around 100 minutes) with the majority occupying just one cassette (less than 50 minutes). It was made clear to me that this is common practice: cassette producers insisted on keeping the duration short enough to fit within a 50-60 minute recording. Unfortunately, I was not able to witness the recitation of hunters' epics in the

countryside where things may be different. Hunters' events are a treat and audiences demand music to dance to. It is quite possible that occasions for donso maana are more frequent than in urban areas and local nkonifolaw may embellish their storytelling with more events and songs that may last several hours. One of the masters of storytelling is Sambouni Diakite who has numerous cassette releases on the Siriman Diallo label. He is considered a skilful weaver of words and proverbs, capable of vivid descriptions and powerful images that enhance his storytelling. As Charles Bird put it in his introduction to *The Songs of Seydou Camara Vol.1 Kambili*:

It is difficult for the Western world to understand the vital importance that the [Maninka] bard has in initiating, mediating and terminating acts. The bard is the master of the word and words are considered to have a mystical force, which can bring supernatural energies to bear. These energies can both augment and diminish a man's power to act. In this context, the bard's responsibility for controlling words is extremely great (Bird 1974).<sup>72</sup>

In June 2010, Solo went to the Mali K7 studio in Bamako to record his fourth album 'NTANA', which contains a long praise song with the same name for one of the chief hunters of the National Federation called Cemogo Doumbia. Fasa or praise singing is a very important component of hunters' music. The bard is required to put all his skill to work in order to produce a credible, persuasive argument within the context of the hunting tradition to accommodate the accomplishments, talents and dexterity of the hunter. Bravery, patience, humbleness, wisdom, knowledge of the bush, mastery in the 'science of the trees', deftness in the occult sciences, morality and ethos are qualities that a great hunter should have and will be praised for. A master of powerful words, the nkonifola, will employ every trick he has up his sleeve to make his praise singing attractive and pleasing to the hunter in order to gain his favour and thus allow him to ask of the hunter more heroic deeds. The bard invites the hunter to become his patron and present him with proof of his extraordinary abilities: a fresh kill, the tail of a wicked beast, the tusks of an elephant or hippo, a fetish, a secret potion, medicinal knowledge or dark spell. Kassim Kone (1996) has shown how Bamana proverbs function in this

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<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately I had no access to Bird's book. I found this quote on <http://www.vianegativa.us/2004/02/portrait-of-a-bard/>. The piece was written by poet, editor and web publisher Dave Bonta.

context using a famous song by Toumani Kone called ‘Baru.’ In what follows I discuss key phrases that Solo uses in his praise song, *Ntana* (e.g. 4), the full text of which is provided in Appendix I.

Solo starts his singing with a wish or request: *An k.a sabari* ‘let us be patient.’ A virtue for every hunter, patience is also required in this context of listening to the ‘word’ of the *nkonifola* who continues: *N kε to juru min fola nin, nin tε fo kondobali ye*, ‘the string I will pluck is not played for an ignorant.’ All hunters are knowledgeable humans, who have learned through years of apprenticeship and experience in the bush. Hunters fight ignorance or darkness as they refer to it (*donbaliya ye dibi ye*). *A tε fola bεε ye*, ‘it is not played for everybody’; only exceptional individuals deserve the sound of these strings; *donsonkoni* is played for the brave, the courageous, the knowledgeable persons; it is played for the hunters. *Bεε man kan*, ‘not all are the same’: people are different. The distinction is made and based on character and morality, not on race, origin or profession. Socio-economic distinctions between people are not part of the hunters’ ethos. To confirm this, Solo comes full cycle, ‘these (strings) are played for hunters’ *nin bεε fɔ donsow ye*.

He continues by making a remark about the world we live in by underlining the vanity and temporality of it: *dina kelan sumuyɔɔ di, dina t’an toyɔɔ di*, ‘the world is a playing ground, it is not a place we stay (forever).’ Jackson (1998: 28-9) discusses *play* in relation to ‘the existential imperative to exercise choice in and control over one’s life.’ He writes, ‘Play enables us to renegotiate the given, experiment with alternatives, imagine how things might be otherwise, and so resolve obliquely and artificially that which cannot be resolved directly in the “real” world.’ Freedom, Jackson continues, enables humans to deny, disagree, challenge, invent and revoke by acting and imagining the situations that restrict, control and define them. Hunters are men of action; free men who constantly negotiate with uncertainty (*kunfe ko*), bush spirits and death.

Solo then goes deeper into Mande symbolism: *A bε n miiri jigi kulanjan na*, ‘he reminds me of the marabou stork’, a black bird with a white belly that feeds on carcasses but is also an astonishing hunter with unique properties. It can suddenly disappear and reappear somewhere else. These birds possess great knowledge and *pama* and can do miraculous things but can also be malicious to people (McNaughton 2008: 244). *Kulanjan* symbolises the hunter. Another praising name that Solo often uses is *foronto* (chilli pepper). It denotes high-spirited bravery, power, cunningness and



determination all properties of the spicy product.

Later on the bard calls his own ancestors in the trade, other *nkonifolaw* that have passed away but have sung the praises of the same hunter: *Sa dunun kan men* ‘listen to the dead people’s drum!’ The drum symbolises the *nkoni* and probably refers to the very first instrument that was used in hunters’ music before the invention of stringed instruments that now have taken over. *N bε nkonifola dow ko fɔ*, ‘I quote some *nkoni* players!’ Citation and referencing is not unusual at all in this tradition. Hunters gain fame through praise songs composed by musicians. Later musicians will use this material as a foundation for their own songs for the same hunter. A famous and powerful hunter may have many *nkonifolaw* around him. He may travel in different regions, attend events and receive the praising of local bards. He will be challenged and eventually will have to provide trophies to them.

Solo then calls for *Cemogo*: *Ka Cεmɔgɔ wele, juru nin bε fo Cεmɔgɔ ye, juru nin be Cεmɔgɔ wele*, ‘I call for *Cemogo*, this string is played for *Cemogo*, this string is calling *Cemogo*’. The name of the hunter, *Cemogo*, is called by the singer and by the harp. The singer demands the attention of the hunter for what he is saying here in song is important. The hunter cannot be distracted. *Muku de kulu*, ‘gunpowder may roar’ there may be noise but he is still calling the hunter. He then singles him out from a long string of brave hunters of the past and of the present: *dow ye sa la, dow ye jinamato la, dow ye wolola*, ‘some are dead, some are alive, some others come to life’. Among the living and the dead, there are some who defy death and can move between both worlds. This is how powerful they are. *I lamanyokon donso bid’l dokon*, ‘a hunter like you has hidden himself’. The hunter has survived and tricked death; he is alive.

Part of the practice of praise singing involves the recitation of the names of deceased hunters who are affiliated with the praised one. According to hunters’ folklore, all hunters claim ancestry from the two hunting deities of *Kontron* and *Saane*. In this way all hunters are brothers and belong to the same genealogical tree. Each praising of dead hunters is equivalent to praising of the hunter’s genealogy, his ancestors. The singer may use expressions like *O bid’l masuma* (he has calmed down); *Donsow siyaman lalen* (many hunters have laid down); *Ne tolo dununkan do* (I hear the drum); *X donso la’Ala* (X the hunter has laid down, Oh God!); *X bid’l mala* (X has calmed down); *X bid’l la* (X has laid down). A reference to the dark side of *donsoya*, X is the wicked hunter/sorcerer who eventually left the world of the living. Solo will then call

the hunter again: Cemogo le, ‘Eh Cemogo!’ Yanto ma diya nima la, X be min? ‘Staying here pleased no soul, where is X?’ For all these hunters, the ancestors of Cemogo, Solo is playing the harp and sings. Cemogo is elevated to the pantheon of his ancestors as a great hunter with whom he is an equal in knowledge and skill, in virtue and astuteness. For this reason Solo is playing the ntanan: ntanan kan ye, ‘the ntanan is on you!’

Ntanan as I have mentioned earlier is one of the donsonkoni jurusen (nkonisen for short) that translate as melodic rhythm or riff. In the next section I discuss the rhythms of Wasulu hunters’ music in relation to symbolism and meaning. I examine for whom they were meant to be played and who can dance to them. Furthermore I list the animals that relate to each of those rhythms in order to understand the latter’s role and position in the hierarchy of donsoya.

## **SYMBOLISM AND MEANING**

Mande hunters often speak of their associations as the progenitors of modern military forces. The associations are hierarchical, with a central general leader and many local ones. In Bamako each Commune has its own chief who is surrounded by a second in command, a secretary and other lower rank officers much like a military subdivision. Every village in Mali has a hunters’ association or is part of a greater area that includes several villages under one association. Each local association is considered a branch of the central one in Bamako<sup>73</sup>. According to oral tradition, hunters, formed the army of Kings and Emperors of Mali since at least the time of Sunjata. So a system of ranking hunters was well established by then. Hunters refer to this system and distinguish its ranks by the degree of danger and number of kills but most importantly by the species that a hunter has killed. Promotions were made according to new trophies that hunters might have brought back to the village.

Musical pieces and praise songs would be composed and sung according to the rank of a hunter and his trophies. Certain nkonisenw were reserved for certain kills according to the species of the animal in question. The hunters who had killed that animal species could dance to that rhythm without risking their lives. Nkonisenw, just like animals, contain pama that can be lethal if contracted by a careless or arrogant

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<sup>73</sup> In reality this is more complicated since there are three (or four) different associations in Bamako with branches all over Mali. The topic is of great interest but not part of this thesis.

hunter who dares to dance to a rhythm that he does not deserve. The punishment does not come from his brother in arms but from the uncontrollable force of the song that he cannot contain because of his limited knowledge. The hunter who has not killed a raging buffalo, for example, does not yet possess the secret to control the animal's *pama* and by implication does not possess the capacity to control the *pama* of the rhythm reserved for buffalo killers. Nkonifolaw often eloquently warn the audience during performance so they do not dance to a 'dangerous' rhythm and expose themselves to risk.

In the early days of the modern era of *donsonkoni* that began with Nkonifo Burama, there were very few rhythms reserved for certain kills: *sirabakelen* was for everyone, killer or not; *kutigefoli* was for those who had made a kill; *ntana* was played for buffalo and leopard killers; and *marasa* for lion, elephant, hippopotamus and bush spirit killers. Over the years these categories became blurred and expanded to include more animals so that they now sometimes overlap. Also other achievements were added to accommodate the need for new songs for new patrons, especially the *somaw*.

*Sirabakelen* (e.g. 5-6) and all its versions, transformations and mutations may be sung and danced by everyone including children, women, hunters, non-hunters, strangers, visitors, tourists, and even researchers from foreign lands! It is an all inclusive rhythm that brings together the community and the brotherhood. It is very much cherished by the hunters because of that and they tend to encourage people of the audience to take initiative and dance to it during public events.

*Kutigefoli* (e.g. 10-14) was originally played for hunters who had made a kill and were returning to the village. The bard would meet them in the bush and accompany them back home playing this *nkonisen* and singing 'I heard the noise of the gunpowder, I heard the noise that killed the beast, this is the noise of a firearm, it is the hunters' noise that I heard!' The name of the rhythm means 'tail-cutting music' and refers to the hunters' most valuable trophy, the tail of the animal. This is the hunter's proof of having made such kill. The hunter will bring the tail back to the village and ask for help in order to transport the beast from the bush into the village. The musician will then accompany the hunters in their mission. *Kutigefoli* is an umbrella term used by hunters and their musicians, that includes several different rhythms sang for different accomplishments regarding animal kills. These *kutigefoli* rhythms are sung for hunters

who killed: kungolε<sup>74</sup> (warthog), sensen<sup>75</sup> (waterbuck), sigi<sup>76</sup> (African buffalo), tank on<sup>77</sup> (tsessebe), dajε<sup>78</sup> (roan antelope), son<sup>79</sup> (kob antelope), tambili, mali<sup>80</sup> (hippopotamus), sama<sup>81</sup> (elephant) and rhinoceros.

Ntana or ntalan (e.g. 9) is one of the heaviest, most serious and important rhythms of the donsonkoni. It was reserved for sigi (African buffalo) and waraninkalan<sup>82</sup> (leopard) killers but now waraba<sup>83</sup> (lion) killers can dance to it as well. All three animals are considered extremely dangerous and great bravery and mastery is required to make the kill. The rhythm is second only to marasa (also maransa), the most sacred nkonisen of them all.

Marasa's (e.g. 7-8) palette of kills has expanded over the years to include wounded lions that might enter populated areas or particularly aggressive ones; survivors of grave accidents like car crashes or plane crashes or terrible natural disasters; victims of war that managed to survive; or hunters who survived weeks in the bush in hunger and thirst. Marasa is played for men who managed to come back to life, resurrect, be revived, '*le personne ressuscitee*'. It is never played for fortune seekers or wealthy people, men who 'please the world'. It is interesting that the rhythm is played for men of great courage and bravery but also for men who do not have to be brave at all. A survivor of an accident may not be a brave man: he may only be lucky, but all the same he deserves to dance the marasa. So, kelεtigiw (warriors), kogelεnkelaw (sufferers) and hunters who have killed waraba (lion), sigidan (African buffalo) and injured sama (elephant) can dance to it.

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<sup>74</sup> *Phacochoerus africanus*. Warthog.

<sup>75</sup> *Kobus ellipsiprymnus*. Waterbuck, large antelope found in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>76</sup> *Syncerus caffer brachyceros*. African Buffalo.

<sup>77</sup> *Damaliscus lunatus*. Common tsessebe or sassaby, found in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>78</sup> *Hippotragus equinus*. Roan antelope found in the savanna of Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>79</sup> *Kobus kob*. The kob antelope is found in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>80</sup> *Hippopotamus amphibius*. Hippopotamus found in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>81</sup> *Loxodonta africana*. African Elephant

<sup>82</sup> *Panthera pardus*. Leopard, found mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa but also other parts of the world.

<sup>83</sup> *Panthera leo*. Lion, found mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa but also other parts of the world..



Fig. 12: Gun and harp: Solo is praising master hunter Doumbia, a lion killer, during a Marasa dance (March 2010).

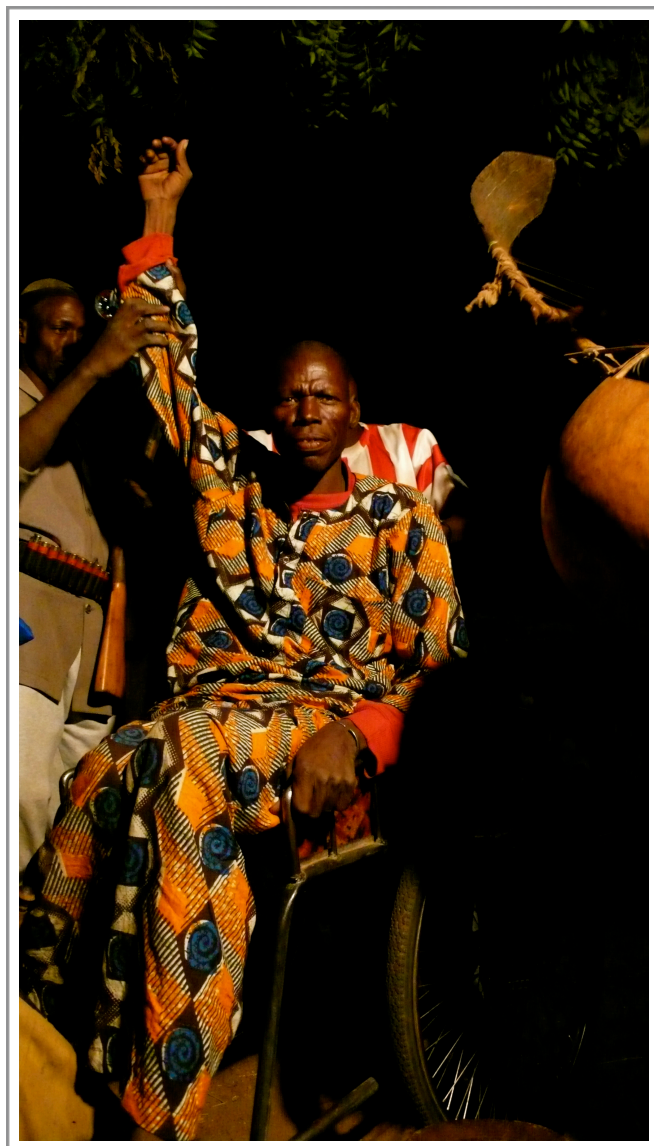


Fig. 13:  
Solo praising a handicapped man on a wheelchair. He played the marasa for him, a rhythm suitable for great hunters but also survivors of severe accidents, war battles and sufferers of ill health (January 2011).

The rhythm has a great deal of *ɲama* and even musicians should be very careful. They should not attempt to dance to it unless they have killed one of the animals or survived accidents and disasters. They are advised only to sing it. However, master musicians must be very careful and protect their students who are playing and might be dancing behind them. They usually remove certain words and phrases that contain the most dangerous portions of *ɲama* in order to minimize the risk for their students and any careless hunter who might join the dance. These are maledictions (*dangaliw*) that were recited at the beginning of the song and are directed to certain fetishes of the hunters asking them to punish the ignorant, the unqualified ones who dare dance to the rhythm. Consequences might include death of the hunter or a member of his family, or other forms of punishment such as a car accident, a snake bite, the explosion of the rifle in his hands, getting lost in the bush for days or months, or the inability of the hunter's spouse to bear children. On demand, the *nkonifola* will recite the maledictions as the protocol demands. If a hunter wants *marasa* to be played for him, it is assumed that he knows the rules and implications. The bard will go by the book and expose the hunter against the hex.

*Ku don n bolo la* is another *nkonisen* that refers to the tail as trophy. The singer incorporates to the song the verse:

I ka sɔgɔ faga, k'a ku don bolo  
Kill an animal and give me its tail  
A don bolo, ku don bolo  
Give me, give me its tail  
Mali faga, k'a ku don bolo  
Kill a hippo and give me its tail  
A don bolo, ku don bolo  
Give me, give me its tail  
Sama faga, k'a ku don bolo  
Kill an elephant and give me its tail  
A don bolo, ku don bolo  
Give me, give me its tail

The rhythm is played for young and skillful hunters who always come home with a kill. Solo use to sing this verse in tailored songs for two young hunters, *Badjalan Donso Fode* and *Faraba Bacari Sow*, both extremely effective in hunting and popular among

the brotherhood and the community. Solo sings the specific *nkonisen* so that other young hunters will derive courage from the singing, and go into the bush to hunt. The rhythm permits the singer to demand an animal's tail from a skilled hunter. The hunter then makes a promise to the bard that the hunter has to fulfill, which in turn, by example, gives courage to young hunters.

The tail of the animal is a sign and symbol of *donsoya*. As Cashion (1984) has pointed out, it denotes power, rank, competence and courage. It is part of the hunters' uniform and a driving force behind the hunt. A hunter will ideally not come back without a kill. This is the meaning of another rhythm, *N'tε jigin so ni do ma sa* (I will not return until an animal is dead). Its verse goes ' I will not return until I kill an animal, animals will die, a spouse respects her husband, I will not return until I kill an animal, a hunter's apprentice respects his master, I will not return until I kill an animal, a sorcerer's apprentice respects his master, I will not return until I kill an animal...' It shows the determination of the hunter. The fact that he will not return empty handed is as true as all other things that have been sung about here: respect for the head of the family and respect for the master-teacher-hunter-sorcerer. *N'tε jigin so ni do ma sa* is a rhythm played for different animal killers that may include: *zozani*<sup>84</sup> (African savanna hare), *warabilen*<sup>85</sup> (Wadi monkey), *mankalanin*<sup>86</sup> (bush duiker), *minan*<sup>87</sup> (bushback antelope), *ngunani*, and *sinε*<sup>88</sup> (gazelle) killers.

Other rhythms are reserved for individuals with special attributes: *Janjon* (e.g. 16) is a rhythm played for *somakorotetigiw* (lit., soma poison master) and *komatigiw* (komo priests). The former are sorcerers that possess the secret of poisons that can be 'thrown' to other humans in order to cause harm. The latter are the priests of the komo secret society. Frequently, these individuals are also hunters and hunters' musicians praise them in song. Rhythms such as *komapagan* (komo benevolent sorcerer-protector) and *suyalabo* (sorcerer-protector) are reserved for magicians-hunters who entertain the public with their magic tricks in ceremonies. These include snake-

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<sup>84</sup> *Lepus microtis*. African savanna hare, found in the African continent.

<sup>85</sup> *Erythrocebus patas*. Wadi monkey or Hussar monkey, a ground-dwelling mammal found from West into East Africa.

<sup>86</sup> *Cephalophus sylvicapra grimmia*. Bush duiker, found in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>87</sup> *Tragelaphus scriptus*. Bushback antelope, the most widespread antelope in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>88</sup> *Gazella dorcas, rufifrons and dama*. Dorcas gazelle, red-fronted gazelle and dama gazelle, found in Africa.



charming, water-finding, card tricks, disappearance and reappearance of objects, amongst others. Similarly, somafoli (e.g. 18) is played for somaw, healers, diviners and sorcerers along with komo priests, while kambili, originally played for a hunter by that name, is now played for many different animal hunters.



Fig. 14: Soma Moustapha Diallo at his mansion in Farabana where Solo was invited to perform. Here Diallo is dancing face to face with Solo (February 2011).

## CONCLUSION

In this Chapter, I was concerned with the sonic and structural elements of hunters' music. I have contrasted the different hunters' musical styles and commented on their popularity; I discussed the musical instruments with particular attention to donsonkoni, the hunters' harp of Wasulu, and explained the symbolic and sonic properties that it embodies; I considered the dynamic properties of hunters' music repertoire and aesthetic traits; and bluntly classified, and analysed hunters' songs and praise texts, to extract the powerful meanings that they hold for hunters and ordinary people. I paid particular attention to the rhythms that Solo Konate uses the most, along with their symbolism and meaning, and underlined how dynamic and rich the hunters' musical tradition is. In fact, during the 1960s, more and more musicians surfaced, and made their way to Bamako where they could find patronage among the hunters of the central branch of the association, play numerous gigs and record for the National Radio. Gaining fame they would tour the country and exchange ideas, acquire inspiration and



recruit students. They returned to the capital to put their fresh ideas (*hakili kura*) into play. They would compose new songs with new riffs and dedicate them to new patrons who would start rewarding them not with cola nuts as was customary but with paper money. The popularity of the *donsonkoni* was growing and after Independence, new genres sprang out of it such as the *kamalen nkoni* (youth's harp) whose inventor was Alata Brulay (see Duran 2000; 2005). The popularity of this new genre gained its peak in the previous decades but is still among the most cherished in Mali and abroad, with two of Mali's international *wassoulou* music exponents being the music stars Oumou Sangare and Nahawa Doumbia. Yet, until the beginning of the 1990s, hunters' music was still very much a genre that was experienced through live performance mainly and only partly through radio, a fact that was changed by the interest of one man in recording and releasing *donsonkoni* cassettes and the boom of the independent radio stations who were ready to promote it. The following chapter discusses hunters' performance in different contexts showing how participants put their skills to work and negotiate their identities as members of the hunters' association.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### HUNTERS' PERFORMANCE

Performances mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body, and tell stories. Performances – of art, rituals, or ordinary life – are made of “twice-behaved behaviours,” “restored behaviours,” performed actions that people train to do, that they practice and rehearse (Schechner 2002: 22).

The Bamana and Maninka hunters perform in every aspect of Schechner's three-fold notion of performance. Many succeed and excel in their professional lives and hunting sports; others play music, dance or put on shows and ceremonies; and some go to the extremes and show off in everyday life (Schechner 2002: 22). Hunters' performances in Mali, mark identities, promote and strengthen communality, teach apprentices proper behaviour and ceremonial procedures, deal with the sacred, and entertain hunters and ordinary people alike. In this chapter I situate Mande hunters' performances in their different contexts to show how they negotiate and communicate hunters' identity through agency and movement in sacred (for hunters' only) and secular (public, open to hunters and ordinary people) events and ceremonies. I provide sections of my fieldnotes along with my analysis, integrating performance theories with a question that Anthony Seeger posed in *Why Suya Sing* (2004): when does performance begin? As everyday life is part of the performative character of hunters' manifestations, I begin before the point when ceremonies commence.

#### **KABANI: ANNUAL SACRIFICE AT THE DANKUN**

As a member of an ensemble of donsonkoni harp musicians, who were predominantly initiated hunters, along with a group of hunters who were not musicians, I traveled from Bamako to Kaba (or Kangaba), a distance of approximately 95 kilometers, in a 'bush taxi' hired by the hunters' association of Bamako, to attend a sacred hunters' ceremony called kabani, an annual sacrifice at the dankun, the term used to designate the local

hunters' shrine. At Kaba, hunters from many different regions gathered, invited by the local Kaba hunters' association. There our delegation joined the locals, including musicians of a simbi harp ensemble, who were all initiated hunters, and hunters who were not musicians. We spent the first evening of our three-day stay at our host's compound, joking and playing some music informally. The older apprentices were showing the newer ones some donsonkoni rhythms and they accompanied them with the karijan, the iron scraper. At night after the sudden visit of the renowned soma (sorcerer, healer and diviner) Mustapha Diallo and Solo's welcoming praise-song, we headed downtown in search of a bar. Many hunters were there, mixing with local hunters and non-hunters and the night out was regarded as successful, as we were cheerful and quite drunk. It was Saturday night and after carrying each other back to the compound we decided to sleep inside the building avoiding the cold and windy yard. According to my fieldnotes, the next day:

***Sun 28 Mar 2010***

*I wake up at 07:00 and wash my face. I thank Solo for the offer but cannot cope with washing my body – no one seems to do that anyway. The hunters are eating a broth for breakfast. I pass. At 07:20 Solo calls me. Yoro is taking us to the neighbouring compound that Mustapha Diallo visited last night. The hunter with the Marlboro hat is here too. We sit under the shelter in front of a big young hunter's room. He is serving a delicacy for us: freshly baked mini baguette bread with lamb meat in a red sweetish sauce out of this world. Yoro encourages me to eat some more. He shares his bread with the hunter with the Marlboro hat. Brulaye arrives. I offer some of my bread to the hunter and Brulaye. The big young hunter gets inside his room and starts a divination. He is using sand on the floor. He is chanting something very fast in Maninkakan that I cannot understand. We stay for 20 min and when Brulaye finishes licking the bowl, we get up and go to Keita's compound.*

*Idrissa and Lansine are here, along with three more local hunters. There is small talk going on then we talk about me (I am very sleepy) and then at 08:20 Keita offers me a Castel. Errr... to get some more sleep? 'No, to wake you up!' Idrissa opens the bottle with his ring. I offer some of it to the others who decline. I drink half of it and give the rest to Keita. We are leaving soon. He brings my rucksack. It weighs a ton this morning... It is time to get dressed for the ceremony. We go back to the house. I put my*

*tunic on. Solo wears his red tunic, and we all go to the 'food compound' to prepare for the procession. Yoro is next to me all the time suggesting what to photograph. It is 09:00.*

*The delegation pays respect to the local chiefs of hunters who are gathered in an enclosed shelter in the yard and then mix with the other hunters of the Manden. I take photos of the shelter with the elder hunters in it. They are sitting in a circle discussing the sacrifice and also gathering smoked and dried meat in the middle of the circle. The rest of us are sitting on benches talking to each other. Yoro invites me to sit next to him and we talk about kamablon (the sacred, circular, mud-brick, thatched house of Kangaba currently being considered as a UNESCO World Heritage cultural site)<sup>89</sup> and the way the jeliw (pl for jeli, griot) re-roof it every 7 years using magic ('they spit on their palms, and the roof rises on its own!' Yoro says). He invites a big hunter to join us. His name is Kouyate and he is a jeli. He explains a few things to me: 'The Mande heartland is governed by the Keitas but it belongs to the Camaras. We, the Kouyates are the first and only true jelis. The Diabates came later along with other families. Even the Kouyates are not all the same. There are three different branches of us. One of them is the true jeli branch that started all.'<sup>90</sup> Adama interrupts to warn me: 'Don't listen or sit next to him; he is a sorcerer; he eats people!' Kouyate confirms: Yes, he is a soma; most jeliw hunters are somaw. They have the power of the word and the power of healing and divination.*

*Ousmane checks on me every now and then. Madu feels somehow guilty of his excessive drinking last night but I act as if nothing happened and he is soon back to his normal protective behaviour. Yoro has practically kidnapped me from his brother Solo and he is explaining things my karamogo should. Modibo, their younger brother is also watching from a distance. It feels like the Konates and the Doumbias have both*

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<sup>89</sup> The cultural property called Kamablon is a mud brick circular building (diameter 4m: height 5 m) covered with a conical roof of thatch. Walls, inside and outside are decorated with paintings supposed to predict the future of Mande during the seven years following the repair of the roof. The Kamablon, located in the heart of bara (a kind of public space reserved for important ceremonies) property is surrounded by several sacred wells and the fig tree that overlook the the grave of Sèmè Massa (founder and first priest of Kamablon). From the UNESCO site: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/1347/> However, UNESCO's interest seems to be limited to this. There is no evidence of interest in the preservation of hunters' traditions and/or music.

<sup>90</sup> This is a good example of Mande social stratification where the roles of nobles and griots is well defined: the Keitas, as descendants of Sunjata Keita, became rulers of the Manden (where Sunjata established his empire. The Kouyate family was the first designated griot family (with three branches). The Diabate family of griots is considered another important family of griots from the village of Kela, eight kilometers from Kangaba. Please refer to the 'Mande Social Structure' section in chapter one and also to Conrad and Frank (1995), Duran (2007) and Hoffman (2000).

*developed a maternal instinct over me and they all cooperate for my well and informed being. I need to point out that the two families, including Baba and Adama (too much present), seem very close friends with special bonds. Yoro shows me the chicken coop and the women who cook and I feel I should take a picture. Then he points to the big piece of meat at the bottom of the marmite, sitting on the burning coals. Breakfast is served for everyone and we are set to go.*

Every event or performance is unique and contingent from each other. Its uniqueness is not in its materiality but in its interactivity. The behaviour itself along with the context and the specificity of the occasion make every instance special. Performance takes place only in action, interaction and relation. Although this ceremony happens always in Kaba every year and is organised by the same hunters' association of the town, its participants can be different. Our delegation had a few members who had been to this event before while for others (including myself) this was their first experience of kabani. The different characters bring their own unique training, needs, motivation and orientation to the event.

Kabani overlays everyday life, arts and music, ritual and play to entertain, mark multiple but also particular identities (like hunters', sorcerers'), strengthen community bonds and create new ones among new and older members. It also promotes kinship ties among members of different families of different hunters and works trans-locally bringing together Bamako, Kaba, Manden. Commensality and the role of food appear to be a very important issue. In this and every ceremony sacred or secular, public or private the preparation and consumption of food were always part of the event. It is always the women (in this case the women of the village) who prepare the food. Many of them are wives of hunters. According to Sekou Camara, they are the only ones allowed to do so, although I believe that this was customary in the past. Today, women from the village or the neighbourhood will offer their skill in the preparation and cooking of the meal. Among the Mande, it is customary for the husbands to give money to their wives to shop for vegetables, herbs, spices and everything that will be used for the soup that will accommodate the meat, usually beef, or lamb, or fish and more rarely chicken as they are more expensive and are reserved as offerings.

In Kaba the number of hunters reached two hundred and the food was enough to feed them all. As the women cooked, the smell of the meat and the boiling of the sauce

released delicious smells promising of a lovely feast. It also reminded me of Paul Stoller's reflections upon the smell of food among the Songhay of Niger:

my senses of taste, smell, hearing, and sight entered into Nigerien settings. Now I let the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of Niger flow into me. This fundamental rule in epistemological humility taught me that taste, smell, and hearing are often more important for the Songhay than sight, the privileged sense of the West. In Songhay one can taste kinship, smell witches, and hear the ancestors" (Stoller 1989: 5).

Hunters' ceremonies are used in different ways; as a teaching tool for new hunters who learn new things; or as an opportunity to discuss matters that preoccupy the association of hunters; hunters will express their opinion and make suggestions in front of the brotherhood, and group decisions will be made. Finally, in every sacred ceremony of the hunters, participants deal with the supernatural, the divine and things-to-come. In this sense, I would argue that *kabani* could be seen as a multi-faceted performance that needs to be analysed keeping in mind the cross-over, multiple emphases, and intermix between categories, in Schechnerian typology. Following my fieldnotes of that same day, and after getting strength from a rich meaty breakfast:

*We walk the main street of Kaba (the Maninka name for the French imposed Kangaba) and then take a right turn uphill where the dankun is. This is not like a procession or parade. It is more informal and intimate. Before the top of the small hill we stop at a few trees to cut small branches and leaves. Yoro gives me some and so does Solo. This is where I stop taking pictures. The brotherhood does not want any pictures taken during the blood sacrifices.*

I had asked Solo for permission to document the ceremony the day before, on our arrival. He said that it would not be possible for me to record, film or take any pictures at the ritual site and especially during sacrifice and divination. The local hunters preferred not to chronicle the event in this way. As an ethnographer I feel the need to go beyond the 'word', to document culture and society in every possible way but I also want to be respectful and trustworthy of the people who agree to help me understand

their world and share their knowledge and lore on all things Mande and donso. Can words fully describe a performative event? I had to face two major setbacks. The first was the language barrier: I attended this event early in my fieldwork and I was still not fluent in Bamanankan but also, this was the land of the Maninka and people spoke their language which is different from the one in which I was trained. The quick speech, the use of metaphors and proverbs that were unknown to me added to the confusion and frustration. The second was my status within the hunters' association: I was a new member still to be tested and in many cases that involved keeping certain knowledge secret for the time being. It also involved keeping 'things to myself' and not sharing with outsiders, non-hunters. On the other hand, are words merely words, or do they touch on the body, sense, experience and power as a sociolinguist or literary theorist such as Bakhtin would say?

That morning, I put my camera away and armed with a number of branches and leaves, I followed Solo and Yoro uphill to meet the rest of the hunters at the hunters' shrine, at the edge of the town:

*I climb to the top of the hill, which is totally flat and occupies an area of roughly 20.000 sq. meters. In the middle of it is the dankun covered in dark red and black volcanic stones put one on top of the other like in a pyramid a meter high, with a cyclical base of a diameter of a meter. Many hunters are here. We are the last to arrive. They have laid the leaves on one side of the dankun facing east and they sit on them forming a semi-circle. The hunters have placed the barrels of their rifles on the dankun. Closer to it sit the higher ranked hunters and the ones who will perform the blood rites. Solo and the ensemble sit at the back of the gathering. Yoro takes me a little further away and into a team of local hunters who welcome us. We sit on the bed of leaves. Keita brings me a bottle of Castel. I think that if this continues I will be passing out before lunchtime... Yoro and I share cigarettes and the beer. I take my daily doxycycline pill for the prevention of malaria and explain to him what it is. He chews a few leaves, folds them and puts them in my external pocket nodding to me. The others watch us. He tells me that one needs to be careful of things. He has lost half of his left middle finger when 'the bullet returned' (the rifle blew up) and had a head injury as well. It happened twice! He points to his forehead. There is a speech and music is played by a simbi ensemble sitting at the front; Then the 'sacrificial massacre' starts.*

The simbi ensemble performed during the sacred ceremony at the dankun. It was always a simbi ensemble from among our hosts who performed at the core of the ceremony; we were there as guests, as a delegation from Bamako, and we would play for entertainment. Our ensemble sat among the hunters. The simbi musicians were the designated music performers of this event as members of the local *donsoton* that was responsible for the sacred rite. Our role there was purely to observe, honour and pay our respects to the dankun, the ancestral deities of Saane and Kontron and we stood by the side of our fellow Maninka hunters. It was only after the completion of the ceremony at the shrine and on our way back to town that we started to play, saving our energy for the evening performance by the Kamablon, which was 'pure' entertainment for hunters and the people of Kaba.

Castel is the beer of choice for the majority of Malians. Locally brewed and bottled, Castel has become a symbol of national identity and pride for many of my friends in Bamako. It is also less expensive than the imported ones from Europe but still much more expensive than the local wine or homemade alcoholic beverage *nya dolo* (which I favoured a great deal to my friends' surprise). The fact that I was offered Castel as opposed to any other beverage shows their hospitality. The beer was warm, an unavoidable fact considering the lack of electricity and refrigerators and the high temperatures during the day. Still, it was a rare treat, much welcomed and pleasant to the dry and parched throat. Sharing a bottle with other hunters brought us closer and was crucial in establishing a relationship between us. Hunters, especially during ceremonies,<sup>91</sup> are drinking alcohol in contrast to the majority of Malians (including all women) who practise Islam and abstain from it. As a cultural artefact, Castel partly symbolises the animist character and identity of Mande hunters.

When I mentioned to Yoro why and how I use my malaria prevention pills (doxycycline), he gave me his own protection against maladies and harm in a performance that combined the verbal and the non-verbal: chewed leaves activated by his incantations. He went on to share one horrible experience of his, the amputation of his finger as a result of the explosion of his rifle, a common event when locally made

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<sup>91</sup> Ceremonies may include sacred such as *kabani* and secular such as wedding, name-giving ceremonies. During such occasions, hunters tend to spend more money in order to buy alcoholic drinks. They usually form drinking groups and share the drinks. One or two hunters from each group, collect money from the others and arrange to get the drinks.



unreliable muskets malfunction. Misfortunes of various degrees are often attributed to magic and curses by individuals, hunters included. There is rivalry among brothers and it is common that jealousy and envy can drive a hunter to put magic spells on one another. As Yoro and I were sharing our experiences about sickness and misfortune and risk, the simbi music ensemble was playing in the background of a speech that climaxed with a blood sacrifice:

*The speaker offers a young chick to be slaughtered first and then chickens one by one get their throats cut by a hunter who spills the blood on the dankun. He reserves some on a bowl for another hunter to mix with dεgε, a white, sweet flour based paste for us to eat<sup>92</sup>. He then throws the chickens away from the dankun to the other side of the semi-circle. There is a breeze coming just after the end of the rites. Yoro points that out. The position the chicken dies in (stops moving) is significant. I asked Keita's karam ɔgɔ and he very kindly and skilfully told me to ask my master if I want to know. Hunters are wandering around the dead chickens' bodies trying to read and interpret the signs.*

*A guy asks another one if I am a donso, trying to determine why I am here. He gets his answer: I am Solo's kalanden and a friend of DaMonson! No one will explain to me anything now, besides I am dragged from one point to the other to see this, meet him, be told that, listen to him, eat the blood dεgε (very sweet and pink) and get a glimpse of the dankun covered with leaves. Indeed, after the sacrifice was over someone started to fill the holes of the shrine with sand and leaves and then all the hunters covered the shrine with the bed of leaves. I contributed to that.*

Mande hunters, in ceremonies like this behave as they have learned during apprenticeship. They abandon their social self as common Malians and adopt their hunter's identity and self. Schechner's (2006: 28) term of 'restored behaviour' explains the way hunters act, react and refer to each other; how they arrange themselves during the procession or around the shrine. On site, they perform the ritual for the hunting deities of Sane and Kontron. These are old ceremonies where action and stasis coexist; the performative action of the hunters and the structure of the ritual. Every action is performed differently but the elements of the ritual for the biggest part remain the same:

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<sup>92</sup> The flour comes from a small millet called sapo (Egyptian or East Indian millet, *penicillaria spicata*) or another one called keninge (sorgum).

the procession, the arrangements, the musical accompaniment, the sacrificial component and the consumption of food were always present in this ceremony. In personal terms, each individual behaves like himself in another state of feeling/being: not as a man but as a hunter. 'Restored behaviour' is the key process of every kind of performance such as in everyday life, in play, in the arts and of course in ritual and healing (ibid; Roseman 1991).

According to Schechner (ibid), restored behaviour is connected to the learned self. I act as I am told to or as I learned. These units of behaviour are not invented by myself. I may feel myself or beside myself as in trance for example. There are multiple selves in each person. Restored behaviour can be 'me' at another time or psychological state such as story telling. It can also bring into play non-ordinary reality as in trance. It is marked, framed and separate and can be stored and recalled, played with and worked on, transmitted and transformed. Restored behaviour is symbolic and reflexive (Geertz 1973: 10, also in Schechner 2006: 28). Geertz sees human behaviour as symbolic action through which, cultural forms find articulation (ibid: 17, also in Schechner 2006: 29). Schechner emphasises the symbolic aspects of culture and perceives performance as a continuum.

When I asked the master hunter the meaning of the various chicken death forms he referred me to Solo. As Schechner (ibid: 28) argues, 'Sometimes the knowledge about restored behaviour is esoteric, privy to only the initiated.' Symbolic and secret knowledge is important and invaluable. It should be transmitted carefully from master to apprentice. Apart from this undeniable fact, his action revealed another aspect of the organisational facet of the brotherhood of the hunters; that of hierarchy. Only too often, hunters' societies are compared to military forces in terms of the discipline, training, organisation and hierarchy involved. The hunter, although knowledgeable, did not want to interfere in my apprenticeship with Solo, especially since he and Solo were not that close and because my master is a donsonkonifola; a group renowned for promoting peoples' reputations. He did not want to take any chances of creating friction between them and at the same time he was teaching me a lesson: always refer to your karamoggo, your master teacher. He is the only one who knows you better than anyone else and is responsible for your training.

Throughout my fieldwork Solo and his apprentices traveled a lot to perform in and around Bamako but also in the regions of Koulikoro and Sikasso. Towards the end

of my stay I was well known to the hunters of Bamako but not to the hunters of other regions, so every time we performed people would ask about me, my status and my business among the hunters, especially in sacred events such as *kabani*, funerary rites and other occasions where we were required to visit the *dankun* or talk to elder and powerful hunters. It was essential that they were aware of my initiation, my apprenticeship to a master hunter and musician and my Bamana name. Once such formalities were settled, I was embraced as a brother in the hunt and ‘all things hunters do.’ In this particular event, *kabani*, my brothers of the Bamako delegation stood up for me as a hunter. The hunter who challenged my presence at the *dankun* during the ceremony was confronted with great respect but a sharp tone. My brothers also mentioned with pride the fact that I am a close friend of Ibrahim DaMonson Diarra, the ORTM radio presenter of *Donso Ka Kεε*, the weekly show dedicated to hunters and their music, which is transmitted nationally. It is the only radio show with such a wide audience. I was elevated to the status of the hunter-brother and after that I was taken on a tour of the site to observe the activities and taste the blood *dεεε*. Socialising and getting to know each other in the brotherhood of hunters is essential so that there are no misunderstandings and friction as I learned during the *kabani* ceremony. After I finished helping the hunters with the covering of the shrine, I started walking around the *dankun*:

*A man named Keita introduces himself to me. He is the Chief of Kaba and the Chief of the tɔn here. He has known many Europeans and Americans who came here to hunt. He even knows a Greek one. I tell him that I am Greek. He has his business card somewhere at home. He asks what is my ‘thing’: shooting, killing, safari going or what? I reply that I am interested in hunters’ music and culture. I am dragged away from him by Adama who is expressing something like: “Why the f^%@ aren’t you eating the blood dεεε? This is point zero of the Mande Empire! This is the beginning of history! This place is sacred and you need to respect that! Eat, eat, eat.” I tell him I know that and I have already eaten. Another hunter confirms that. Adama just won’t listen and calls the hunter with the offering. Orders him to give me some. The hunter tells Adama that I have taken dεεε twice. Adama stops and calms down: ‘You have done well!’ he says, and leaves. I am told to pluck a chicken. This is what *kalandenw* do! I start doing that and I am dragged again away. The *simbi* ensemble plays all this time a sweet*

*heptatonic melodic piece. Our donsonkoni ensemble rests in the shadow of a tree at the edge of the top. I join them. It is 10:30 and getting really hot. Time to go downhill to the Chief's house.*

Chief Keita was not surprised by my nationality but he was very surprised by my hunter's identity. Mande hunters distinguish between hunting and wild animal killing. Donsow are much more than game seekers and killers. Their ethos includes preservation of wildlife, which is essential in periods when crops are scarce. They smoke, dry and store meat for a rainy day and for special occasions such as sacred ceremonies like *simboni* and *bələbɔ* (see Cisse 1994) and hunters' gatherings. My answer showed a willingness to go beyond hunting as killing and to know the 'true meaning of *donsoya*,' they thought. Keita welcomed my response with a wide smile as Adama Doumbia emerged from behind to demand an explanation for my behaviour.

He questioned my status, based on the fact that I did not ingest the offering pointing out the importance of place, the ceremonial site and the land of ancestors. In his discussion of ethnographic research as performance, Conquergood (1989) argues that *power* invokes politics, history, ideology, domination, resistance, appropriation, struggle, conflict, accommodation, subversion and contestation. Performance is a public site of struggle where "competing interests intersect and different viewpoints and voices get articulated" (ibid). The conduct of ethnographic research is embedded in issues of power and authority, and fieldwork "mediates a set of power relations that determines who is observing whom" (ibid: 84). Adama was exercising his authority as an accomplished member of the brotherhood, a hunter, a *soma* and an older brother by pointing out the symbolic meaning of blood *dɛgɛ*. It was only after the confirmation that I had in fact consumed quantities of food that he conceded. That incident was the beginning of a close friendship throughout my fieldwork. After the misunderstanding was solved I joined Solo and his students who were resting in close distance. The local hunters called for us. We were leaving the site and going back in town:

*We all gather and start the procession. The simbi ensemble leads the way followed by the local hunters in a single row. Then our donsonkoni ensemble follows them and leads the Bamako delegation in a single row. Solo walks by the ensemble; I move back and forth taking pictures. We enter the 'food compound' and the hunters*

*dance to the music of our ensemble. Gunshots<sup>93</sup>. After 5 minutes we go to the house of Keita, the Chief of the local ton, the entire hunter's society assembled at Kaba. Our donsonkoni ensemble enters first and then the hunters. Lansine, who enters before the others and musically 'leads' the ensemble, performs a fast piece for solo dancing. Adama accompanies him by playing the second donsonkoni, whilst Namani and Kalifa play the nege or karijan. The delegation starts dancing one by one. At 11: 05 we enter the blon, the room at the entrance where the elder hunters and Chief are meeting. I stay for a few minutes among hunters of the area and then I join the others in the yard. We are told to go to the small forest next to the 'food compound.'*



Fig. 15: Hunters' procession after the sacrifices at Kangaba's dankun during the Kabani ceremony. The calabash bowl carries the ceremonial blood *dεge* (March 2010).

The procession was rigidly structured with our hosts, as the indisputable holders of this land and its 'sacred' history, preceding our delegation. Each music ensemble led its group of hunters. Master musician Solo did not play but rather walked along, accompanying and observing our ensemble. At the 'food compound' it was our ensemble that played music to dance to. Wasulu donsonkoni is renowned for the quick, cheerful and upbeat rhythms that make people dance. Our passing through the compound on our way to the Chief's house was a way to notify the people that the

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<sup>93</sup> Whenever there is music and dancing involved in hunters' ceremonies, muskets are fired up in the air. In this case, it was the local hunters, that welcomed the procession back in town, it meant that the sacred part of the ceremony was over and it was time for a dance before visiting the chief of hunters of Kaba.

ceremony at the dankun had ended. The women were informed that lunch was approaching and we had to take just a few more things before we could eat.

At Keita's place, we paid our respects by performing some music and dancing; then it was time for us to leave matters to the elder hunters. The blon was a medium-sized room that could accommodate only a certain number of us. I sat by Solo for a while until we got up, greeted the hunters and left the room. They talked about the ceremony in private. All we were told was that it went well and the signs were good. It would be a good year. The ritual illustrates authority and shows how men and women, the elder hunters and the chief move around in space but also in society and the brotherhood. It also shows how important speech is especially in the interpretation of signs during sacrifice and divination but also resolution of disputes, as I shall show below. On our way to the small forest to meet our delegation:

*I am walking with Yoro; when we arrive we find Solo lying on our mattress drinking rum with a twist of lime on the rocks (just one but big!). He offers me the cup. I share with Yoro. Idrissa is here too along with the members of our ensemble, plus Brulaye and the handicapped hunters. Ousmane comes to tell us to go back to Keita's compound to get the food. We return there and wait to be served. Namani grabs the crotch of a young apprentice in his mid-twenties, who they call Kontron. He is hurting (Namani gave him a slight flap on his crotch, as a joke) but does not seem angry. Our host, Chief Keita tells us to take the bowls to the entrance and then brings fried chicken (from the sacrifice). We take the food to the forest and the delegation follows. Adama stays behind. We have a wonderful meal under the trees and a bowl of the morning delicacy. I sit by Solo and Kalifa and Nfali join me to look at pictures. Yoro asks me why I took his picture. I joke and tell him that I will enlarge it to make a giant poster and put it in the city centre of Bamako. He looks cool and then he laughs. I quickly explain that everything I document visually is for us. If I need something to publish, like a photo or video (or music) I will certainly ask permission from the people involved and/or from the donsotɔn if that is the case. He is very impressed by my answer and likes it. They all love the photos.*

Solo was always one-step ahead of the rest of us in every occasion throughout my stay in Mali. He almost managed to be present at two places at once. We would leave a spot

first but he would end up ahead of us without been seen pass by. His fellow hunters attributed that to his magic powers. The apprentices including myself went to get the food, including the cooked chickens, from Keita's house. It was cooked by women in different compounds, including the 'food compound', and brought to the Chief's house. While waiting, Namani joked with Kontron. They were both in their mid-twenties and were apprentices. Joking among hunters is very common especially when young ones are involved. Older hunters can tease, hit or call the younger ones names, and they will endure it and laugh, but this cannot occur the other way around. It is a sign of respect for the older and wiser, but between themselves the young hunters have their imagination as a limit. Though I was newly initiated and thus considered a 'younger' member of the group, I was trying to joke with Yoro, Solo's older brother, when I mentioned my picture of him becoming a poster at downtown Bamako. Yoro is in his forties (my age) but an experienced hunter who used to be a very dangerous one too. I had to explain myself before we understood each other again. I felt like I was stepping over the line for a moment but he was graceful enough to tolerate my humour. Joking behaviour then, too, is caught up in the performative expression of one's position vis a vis authority and power. What was not tolerable though was Adama's excessive drinking. Indeed, as we were enjoying the photos:

*There is a dispute concerning Adama who now arrives angry like mad! I have no clue as to why. Adama and our delegation of hunters speak very quickly and in a heavy accent. I am lost and think I will talk to Yoro or Solo about that. Solo talks and calms things down. They all listen to him very carefully. Then Adama gets angry again. Yoro tells him for Gods sake to stop the conversation. A local hunter from Kaba intervenes and speaks for Adama and the hunters of Kaba. The dispute is over. They all agree. Adama is about to start again but they all look at him, Yoro says that we have concluded this discussion and everything is fine and over.*

Adama Doumbia stayed behind to dine and drink with the local but he overdid it and started behaving in an improper manner. He was joking, screaming, dancing and being an extrovert, which was perceived as insulting to our hosts. When he arrived in the forest, he was also upset and sure he had committed no crime. He started fighting verbally with the hunters of our delegation. There was unrest and Solo took over. Both

men were friends since childhood and that seemed to calm Adama down who felt less threatened and in good hands, but Solo put him in his place by saying that we were all guests here and we should behave with respect. We were invited to participate in this ceremony; the brotherhood had chosen us specifically to be part of this delegation and that made us responsible to stand up to their expectations. Adama's behaviour was unacceptable. He became inebriated and spoke, moved and teased women and this was out of order. The hunters' code of ethics is clear on this (Cashion 1984).

Solo assumed the role of public moraliser that great donsonkonifolaw are known for. His authority was undeniable. All hunters listened to him carefully, including Adama. Hunters' bards are powerful men who have hunters' reputations in their hands as musicians, and in their mouths. Performed speech in that respect is very important in all these expressive media: everyday life, ceremony, and song. As Adama calmed down, our delegation of hunters started to relax and socialise with a few local hunters:

*It is now about 3:00 pm; I am tired and take a longish nap. In the meantime hunters come and go and form three different discussion groups under different trees. I wake up at 16:30 alone under ours! I look around. Solo is with a group straight to my left. Bemba and Nfali to my right. I am thirsty and dirty. The forest has very thin grey sand that make my feet look funny. Cows wander around; a motorcycle passes through speeding and creating a cloud of grey dust. The local hunters ask about my Malian surname. Tarawele won't do it, they say. I need to have my master's surname: Konate. I turn to Solo who says Konate or Tarawele, either is the same. I tell Solo that I need to wash. He orders Bemba to take me to our host's home and arrange for some water. I walk with him. He is very sweet with me and tries to explain in Bamanankan before using French. I have to note that all the hunters are on a mission to teach me Bamanankan! I really appreciate that. We arrive at the house and Kalifa with Nfali are there, playing the harp. Nfali passes me one. I make an effort and play a siraba, a hunter's harp rhythm, with Kalifa and a siraba Toumani Kone, an older version of this rhythm, with Bemba. Hunters who pass by are very pleased with what they hear. I am exhausted but keep playing until a bucket of cold water for my bath has been drawn from the well, heated, and put in the washroom.*



Sinankunya, or joking relationship among the Mande is well documented (Bird 1980; Conrad and Franck 1995; Hoffman 2000; Karp and Bird 1980; McNaughton 1988, 2008) and we certainly joked a lot during my stay in Mali. What was also interesting is the fact that hunters and common people in general expected me to adopt the surname of my teacher/master, Konate. Although Solo had absolutely no problem with me being a Tarawele (or Traore in French), people would raise this issue at every opportunity. Solo himself told me that Cemogo Doumbia's apprentices changed their surnames to Doumbia. This way they showed respect, submission to a great knowledgeable hunter, Chief of the hunters of Commune IV of Bamako and beholder of great secrets. They became his children but also his slaves in the way traditionally slaves did once in the house of a master.

Teenager Bemba Konate is Yoro's son and considered Solo his father, as is customary among the Mande people. Very frequently he sat with us and played the harp and he would follow the ensemble at gigs to play the *nege*, but he was not one of Solo's apprentices. He was not initiated into the brotherhood and that is why he was not allowed to accompany us to the shrine that morning for the ceremony. Instead, he stayed in town and waited for our return. He wanted to become a *donsonkonifola* but Solo had not accepted him yet. The following June, after Solo's return from a month of performing in Gambia, Bemba pursued an apprenticeship with a *soma*, and abandoned any desire he had to become a musician. He was very good at playing the harp and very patient and polite with me. That afternoon and after playing music with my fellow students, I took a warm bucket shower and sat in the yard to enjoy the breeze:

*I watch Adama arrive in the house. Bemba and Kalifa grab the opportunity to practice praising in song. They go in front of him and start. Adama enjoys it a lot by dancing on the spot and giving them advice. They do a second piece and I raise his hand in the air crying: I Dansogo, a hunter's greeting, while stroking his calf down to his foot as customary.*

Adama Doumbia returned to the compound cheerful and in full gear: tunic, trousers, hat, bag, dozens of amulets and protection bracelets, belts and necklaces, along with his knives, machetes and rifle. A couple of women and a few girls were present in the compound to make sure that our delegation had everything it needed: snacks, drinking

and bathing water, blankets and so forth. Some boys from the neighbourhood were coming and going, playing with each other. I was getting ready for the evening event and checking my recording gear. After the sacred ceremony at the dankun, that morning, a public evening celebration took place in the centre of Kangaba, next to the kamablon house. The evening event was organised by the local hunter association and featured music by various simbi ensembles and our donsonkoni ensemble. Adama's dispute was in the past and forgotten. Bemba and Kalifa decided to play and praise Adama. This was an informal occasion and setting. The young men were wearing ordinary clothes and no protection amulets or belts although they would dress up for the night event. Bemba, although uninitiated, had in his possession such means as a gift from his father.



Fig. 16: L-R: Adama Doumbia, Solo Konate and Idrissa Doumbia; Soma, donsonkonifola and donso on the way to Kangaba for the kabani ceremony (March 2010).

The two of them grabbed the nkoniw and approached Adama who was standing in the middle of the yard. It was early evening and the sun was very low on the horizon. The yard was in shadow and very quiet. Their song came out loud through their untrained voices but the words were clear. They were praising Adama for being a brave man and hunter, the 'hot chilli pepper' who gives spice to an event, the blacksmith, possessor of great fetishes and secrets. Adama was smiling at them. That would have been unusual behaviour in a formal context. Usually praised hunters remain quiet, reserved and very serious with no facial expressions whatsoever. Yet, that was not the

case here. Adama was a great and close friend of the Konate brothers, a man who Bemba thought of as kin. The hunter was nodding as he appreciated the effort and made comments and suggestions regarding their position in respect to his. They took a step back and continued their song. He then corrected the volume of their singing and told them when to raise their voices. They started again. Adama seemed pleased. The young men ended their song by introducing a different rhythm, somafoli, a designated rhythm to the somaw, which is very popular among the Bamako population. Adama as a soma himself was very pleased; his identity as an accomplished and authoritative figure was established through song. I approached and greeted Adama accordingly by saying ‘I Dansɔgɔ’, a multivocal expression meaning ‘you who penetrate the bush’, ‘you and the bush animal’ or ‘you who go beyond the limit’ (*lit.* you-limit-meat). At the same time I stroked his calf all the way down to his foot, a kinaesthetic symbol for assuaging the pains of hunters from walking in the bush.

Adama responded to my greeting, ‘I ni ko!’ another expression with multiple meanings: ‘you and the matter’, ‘you and the knowledge’, ‘you and the secrets’. We were interacting as brothers in the hunt. He was pleased with my increasingly competent and skilled performance as a humble yet audacious student that day and let me know. Bemba and Kalifa were pleased too and we all shared cigarettes and a cup of water, then prepared for the evening’s concert to come. The kabani ceremony can be seen as a composite hunters’ event. The actual sacred rituals are performed at the dankun shrine, in the presence of only initiated hunters. On site, these hunters behave, move and speak in a formal and particular way that characterises hunters only. Their ‘restored behaviour’ informs the ceremony: serious, robust, laconic and proactive, they ensured the efficacy of the ceremony and secured a generous future. Even when they leave the ceremonial site to return into town, hunters retain their hunting identity throughout the day. Armed with new information from the divination held on site, hunters continue to interpret, develop and discuss the findings between them, to make sense of the things-to-come. They continue to perform in everyday life after the sacred ritual at the dankun, among common people. The secular component of kabani started the previous day with our arrival in Kangaba and reached its peak the night of the sacred ceremony, with the public concert at the centre of the town. There, hunters played music, danced, were challenged to bring meat and promise high deeds. They invited the public to celebrate with them. The whole town was gathered at the evening

concert. Hunters retained their prestigious selves and restored behaviour but they were much relaxed, their ‘multiple identities’ were much more at play. In the next section, I discuss a different evening concert, a secular performance that helps establish the identity of a soon-to-be-married couple.

## **Furu: WEDDING CEREMONY**

Hunters musicians are invited to perform for a number of different occasions that I call *public events* in the sense that are not restricted to hunters only. These are usually celebrations in the form of ceremonies, the most common being wedding and child-naming parties.<sup>94</sup> The ceremonies are secular events that are disconnected from the religious rituals that occur during weddings and baptisms, and are not performed when commoners (or non-hunters) get married or baptised. They usually take place during Friday or weekend nights and are organised by the father of the offspring who is either getting married or baptised. The father is almost always an initiated hunter; the event takes place inside or outside his compound on the street or in a public and open space nearby, as in the following case study.

The purpose of these events is ‘pure’ entertainment or *ɲenajɛ*. Hunters are always invited and expected to attend, pay their respect to the father and family, offer their best wishes and participate through dancing, blowing their muskets and interacting with the ordinary people who are present. The latter are always a mixed audience of men, women and children of all ages, kin of the parents, neighbours and friends of the family. The organiser is expected to provide the PA system along with the technicians, lights, food for the ensemble and the crew, drinking water for everyone present at the ceremony and sometimes other beverages, but no alcohol. This is always bought, offered, shared and consumed almost exclusively by hunters.

The hunter-father-organiser does not have to pay the musicians. Money is offered to them by the hunters, *somaw* (healers, diviners, sorcerers), or even by ordinary people, during praise songs. The praised person will give money to a mediator, a spokesman – most likely a hunter – who will call an apprentice of the singer to take

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<sup>94</sup> During my fieldwork, Solo was invited to perform in many different contexts for entertainment only. Apart from wedding and child-naming ceremonies, these include anniversaries in hospitals and the military; private club soirees and book launches; New Year’s Eve private parties; radio station parties; and various festivals in Mali and Gambia.

the money and put it inside the gourd of the harp. Other items will be given to the bard the same way, like freshly killed game, cloth, domestic animals or birds or even cars.<sup>95</sup> An event can usually earn around 50,000 FCFA or £63, a decent amount for a night's job. Different authors have dealt with how the politics of the personal are performed in people's responses through payments to praise singers: Askew (2003) in the *taarab* context in Tanzania, Charry (2000), Duran (1995a, 1999) and Hoffman in the griot context in Mali. That specific night in Ngomiranbougou, Solo did very well and surpassed this amount. He also received other non-monetary gifts. The event, a wedding celebration that took place in the middle of my stay, was particularly successful with a cheerful and enthusiastic audience. They were excited by the performance of the ensemble and the presence of many hunters who effortlessly engaged with the public in a communal, warm and joyful manner. I was feeling more confident with the Bamanankan language and totally at ease among my colleagues. As usual, my teacher wanted to arrive well ahead of the beginning of the event, check things out, socialise with our host, make sure everything was ready for the concert and have a drink or two. For me, that meant an eight-hour intensive fieldwork session, exhausting but also exciting and rewarding.

### ***Sat 30 Oct 2010***

*Solo and his apprentices arrive at 18:45 and Lansine comes to get me. I get dressed and grab my bag with the rum. Diakite<sup>96</sup> suddenly tells me that 03:00 in the morning is too late for the door to stay open and I will have to ring Nabu when I come back to let me in. He gives me a card with phone numbers I already have. I get in the car and greet everyone. Namani, Brulaye, Adama and I sit at the back with one nkoni; Lansine sits at the front with the other one, and Solo is driving.*

*We go through the neighbourhoods of Hamdallay to Badjalan three and then cross the rails. We arrive in the foli yoro<sup>97</sup> at 19:05. It is a football field next to the army*

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<sup>95</sup> Expensive gifts to donsonkonifolaw are usually given by the wealthy and pleased somaw following a long and elaborate praise song by their favourite hunters' musician. There are many examples of somaw who offered one of their cars to bards including Solo Konate.

<sup>96</sup> At the time, I moved to a small apartment, part of a Senegalese restaurant's compound. Diakite was the maitre of the restaurant and a very gracious and polite man who appreciated and honoured the donsow. The rest of the staff, all women, including the owner, Mm Nabu, were afraid of them.

<sup>97</sup> This translates as 'performance place' and would be the performance space or site of the event.

barracks. Djo Bala, the soundman, is here with his white sedan and the PA system. No one else and no other props, such as chairs or lights, are yet present. We greet. A young man recognises me from the other night in Lafiabougou. He offers me a seat next to him on his motorcycle. Solo and his students are socialising. A few men arrive. Children are playing around and a few young men are jogging around the field. I wander around. It is a huge open space and I wonder how they plan to arrange the seats and the sound, let alone the lights... The kids start to approach me to say hello and good evening. There are about a dozen and they are thrilled that I speak Bamanankan. They want to know everything: my name, my parents' names, where I come from etc. A few wonder if I am Malian, others if I am a hunter. I retire into the car where I can see, to take some notes and they follow me there. They play with the window. Some are fascinated by the nkoni. A couple of little girls want to sit on my lap and watch me as I write.

Namani comes to my rescue. He asks me if there are any drinks here. I put the bottle in the trunk but "sure", I say, "we can go for a beer." Lansine and another guy with short dreadlocks join us. We cross the rails and turn left into the actual Ngomiranbougou quarter and its mud roads. On the first right we find the bar: a big space with a few low tables and chairs. I tell them that I used to live close by in the relatively new quarter of Lasare just across the bridge. We sit and I introduce myself to Ace. He is a former student of Solo who eventually quit the nkoni to play the sabar drums. His surname is N'Bay and is a Wolof. He has his own band here. They play mbalax amongst other things.

Namani sits opposite us. He is in great form tonight and talks constantly about everything and everyone. He runs out of cigarettes and asks for money. I tell him to quit as I did four months ago. Cigarettes are his heart, if he quits he will die, he says. An older guy beside us is furious with him. He is a Keita. The waiter is a Diarra. I am a Tarawele and his joking cousin, and we are laughing out loud! I get everything they say. It is like a miracle. This time I am so confident with the language. I find Lansine difficult to understand sometimes because he uses many idioms and proverbs in classic Bamanankan, but I can always ask him and he will always explain. We have a round of big Castels and another two to share and it is time to go. They all wish us good luck with the concert and we walk back. I ask Lansine about the purpose of the concert tonight. He tells me that Solo has not specified anything. He is like that, he says, whilst other karamɔŋow inform their students, he prefers not to for some reason...

Genealogical orientation is very important for people and among the Mande this translates in different ways. The children at the football field wanted to know my Malian name so they can 'locate' me in their terms, much like the Temiar of Malaysia (Roseman 1993: 174-179) locate Roseman in their kinship network. Introductions are thus very characteristic in Mande culture and Namani, although a Konate, identified himself as a Keita, the ancestral older brother of Konate, projecting in Turino's (2008:102) terms, his royal descent to the folk in the bar. Diarra, the waiter, was delighted that I am a Tarawele and immediately started making jokes about my ancestry and how it relates to his own.

Language and communication are critical tools for an ethnographer if he wants to find out more than what lies on the surface of things. Everyday practice helped my linguistic understanding and made me able to comment on the power and meaning of speech in everyday life and ritual performance. It was at that stage of my research that I started questioning actions and notions of performance, like the secrecy revolving around the events that we were called to perform for. Solo was always secretive and none of his students knew anything in advance. His students rarely knew where, for whom, for what reason we were to perform or even if any other *donsonkonifolaw* were there to perform with us. Countless times, when I asked the students about these issues, they would either provide me with false information or would admit that they knew nothing at all. Many times, they complained among themselves about this preferred secrecy of their master. Solo, on the other hand, would give me the right information when I showed persistence, following the Malian ethnographer and initiated hunter Fode Moussa Sidibe's advice: "Here in Mali, if you do not demand things, you will never get them!" Fode Moussa was referring in particular to his experience doing research among the Mande hunters. I tried to keep his advice in mind, whilst trying to be sensitive and discrete. It worked, but I settled for the students' uncertainty for the most part and delved into these discussions only after we were on site, when the apprentices and I would go to a bar and have drinks. Then I would talk again to Solo, who would tell me more about the event the next morning during our lesson. Speech, then, has its limits, and an ethnographer must learn the cultural rules of who to speak with and when.

Sekouba, my other teacher told me that his father, Seydou Camara and Yoro Sidibe always shared such information with their students and that he found Solo's secrecy puzzling. We came to the conclusion that my teacher was informed by cultural notions of bad luck and 'evil eye' and did not want to jeopardise the performance by sharing these matters. After our joyous excursion to the bar that evening, we returned on site:

*Solo is sitting by the car with Djo and Brulaye. He asks where we have been and laughs. I sit beside him. There are chairs around a space, a quarter of the football field on its northwest corner. The sound desk is north, the musicians' stools to the south and the hunters' mats to the east. The PA loudspeakers are facing each other east to west. There is a lamp behind the mixing desk and another one to the southwest corner of the foli yoro. People start to arrive. I start to play the harp and Namani joins me. Solo moves the car to the other side of the desk to the east side and tells us to go and get dressed.*

*My clothes are at home, Namani says, and offers me his donso fini (hunter's tunic). He will wear the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Mali's Independence uniform. Food is served: spaghetti with a deliciously oily tomato sauce and bread. People gather around us to eat. I stand, then wash my hands. A guy offers me his seat opposite to Solo and next to Brulaye. I eat huge amounts of food! I love it. I end up being the only one left dining! Solo is content. Lansine jokingly tells me to play the *nege*, tonight. I decide that I will not until Solo says I am ready. He goes to sit on his stool on the other side of the performance site. Namani accompanies Adama into the centre of the site. Ace is playing the *nege* for them.*

*Bintu Traore, my youngest sister, a married woman with children, arrives and greets us. We talk about the *nkoni*, Solo, Lansine, Bintu's friend from teenage years Joli, and other friends. She will watch from behind the stools. Solo gets in the car to get dressed. I join the others on the stools but very quickly realise that there are not enough. Solo joins us. The hunter Idrissa Doumbia comes to greet me. I get up and situate myself next to the loudspeakers on the west side, where I can sit and watch, then move to the centre of the performance site, take pictures and retire. It works really well. The light is poor, the sound is loud and the quality is bad because of the current's instability but I manage to get some nice ones. The performance itself is a hit!*



Every performance site I attended in Bamako was created the same way. Hired iron chairs were used to delineate the arena and were reserved for the organiser's kith and kin and neighbours along with important guests. If chairs were abundant, people would appropriate them and be ready to offer them to late guests. The hunters would always sit inside the arena and on mats provided by the organiser. The ensemble would sit on very low wooden stools that were brought from the compound. Solo always carried his own wonderfully carved stool in the trunk of the car so he did not have to worry about finding one that suited him on site. Chairs (and peanuts, imported from the Ivory Coast) rule the world here in Mali,<sup>98</sup> as performance props, chairs, who gets them, and who gets which ones and which types of chairs, are an important indicator of one's status within the performance hierarchy.



Fig. 17: Children at the National Guard premises in Bamako. Behind them is the site for that evening's performance (April 2010).

Food was always served before the beginning of performance. Large plastic bowls full of rice and various sauces like *nsame* (riz au gras), *tigadɛgena* (peanut sauce) or *nyuguna* (green leaves sauce), or beans with onions, or as in this case, pasta with tomato sauce. The bowls were accompanied with meat, usually beef or lamb, but

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<sup>98</sup> It was my language teacher, Mahamadou Konta who told me so in two different occasions: 'Namakoro, if peanuts stopped coming for one reason or another, the world would stop!' And commenting on his sister's wedding and reception in his house 'Chairs, all people need them and are never enough!'

sometimes fish. Solo has the habit of tasting the food but keeping his stomach light for the performance. His students were more eager to satisfy their appetite and so was I, partly because of the consumption of appetising beer that we used to have before the concert; a tradition I found in the field and embraced. We all ate together around the bowl of food using our right hands and always inviting and accommodating other people such as technicians, musicians, friends and family members, all male, who happened to be there for the event.

Bintu, Madu Traore's youngest sister (and my classificatory one) was there because she happened to be in the neighbourhood. Her friend Joli was involved with Solo in the past and was a great fan and 'concert goer', much like a groupie but without the sex bit, at least as far as Solo would admit. Bintu was always very supportive and helped a lot in my bonding with Solo. She advocated for me just as her mother did. We were all tied together by bonds of friendship and kinship. She proudly watched me moving around and inside the arena wearing Namani's tunic. That was common practice between the students. Lansine and Solo, however, always wore their personalised hunters' gear — tunics and trousers, amulets and protective belts — and used lotions to wash before the concert. These lotions have protective properties, but also increase the effectiveness of performance. They make the voice stronger in volume and the content of speech authoritative, enabling the singer to find and use words and phrases more quickly and address the hunters more boldly and effectively. They bring success to performers.

*Adama starts at just before 22:00 and does a couple of rounds before getting a hunter to get up. It is then Lansine's turn to perform and at 22:20 he is touring the arena. He takes the Doumbias for a ride and I get up and greet them as hunters do, by raising their arms up in the air. He does another tour but no dancing. Solo picks up the nkoni at 22:40. A train passes by! Solo is at the arena touring. He walks like a bird! It is only now that I notice that! From a distance in an open space like this, it is obvious! The students follow him around like fledglings and as soon as he turns around, the students scatter around like scared kids. He picks up a tall hunter who has been shooting his rifle all night and then another one. Shoe traces on the soil. Solo keeps welcoming hunters that enter the space; Diallo, the soma with a snake. Fellow hunters accompany them in the dance. A radio presenter is the spokesman tonight. He opens a*

*big blue plastic bag and distributes cola nuts to the representatives of the various communes of Bamako. Solo welcomes another great hunter. Ousmane Doumbia picks up the microphone to announce that this hunter has killed a lion, an elephant and a buffalo among other animals. Solo then challenges another hunter in plain clothes and jeans who will grab the microphone and praise Solo and his skills as a hunter and a singer! It is time for Solo to pick up our host and takes him for a dance. All the hunters and the women follow him to the dance.*

As I have explained in previous chapters, hunters' bards are called kono or birds and are admired for their singing. Human song is then compared to bird song very much like in the *Kaluli* society of Papua – New Guinea (Feld 1990). This symbolism extends to movement also. As I became more experienced in the field I was able to pay attention to detail and repetition. Solo, as his teacher Yoro mentioned, was an excellent performer partly because of his movement on the arena. Yoro was proud of him and promoted Solo's ability to move, approach and challenge hunters: 'He walks like me. He is very careful with his steps. He knows when to move fast and when to be reserved.' Another student of Yoro, Sekoubani Traore is the most popular donsonkonifola in Mali. An excellent dancer and singer, he also moves like a bird. Movement symbolism in hunters' performance is prominent and rich and needs further research. The kinesis of these musicians resembles the walking of the birds and is also similar to the movement of roosters. The steps but also the position of the body, all male performative gestures of the musicians can relate to the performative gesture of the cock; a very important and sacrificial bird.

The Yolngu people of north-eastern Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia, also perform as birds. Magowan discusses the role of movement in the performance of Yolngu mortuary rites, showing how song paths structure transformations of animals, birds, water, wind, towards and away from the body, carrying the spirit of the deceased to the Land of the Dead; and how singing and dancing are central to creating social connectedness and senses of community through 'performative emotions' (2007: 71). She argues that by focusing on feeling and meaning in funerals we may 'elucidate a template of performative emotions that underpins ritual and orders clan relations' (ibid: 102). She notes that what is happening is what Merleau-Ponty describes as 'mutual confirmation' (1962: 185) in performing together. The

dancers will urge singers to sing more energetically and project their voices whilst responding with more vigorous actions. Singers and dancers work together so that the dynamics of the performance are deeply intertwined (Magowan 2007: 99).

In donsonkoni performance something similar happens in the quickening of the tempo. As Solo explained about the performance structure, at the beginning the singer and the ensemble sit down and start a song – donkili. Then they stand up and continue the song while they tour the arena. The singer then goes to a hunter and kneels before him. The ensemble kneels too and the singer starts negotiations with the hunter to dance – t̄er̄emeli. When the hunter stands up and other hunters join him in the dance, the singer starts praising the hunter in the middle of the arena – fasa. When this is over, Solo and the ensemble start accelerating the rhythm of the song and go back to their stools to sit down – donkili t̄eliman. Hunters start to dance one by one, imitating wild animals that run away from the hunters to save their lives. In the process dust rises from the fast movement of their feet. Hunters compete during the quick dance and show off their ability in the dance. As dust is in the air, the crowd screams and claps their hands. The ensemble accelerates the tempo, forced by the faster dancing of the hunters. I have seen this section going on for nearly ten minutes. It is exhausting for the hunters, who usually spend no more than a few seconds to a maximum of one minute dancing in front of the musicians. The latter have to keep up as long as there is demand from the dancers to dance. They would comment after such sections, “Aah, they are very powerful tonight, they want more and more, they will make us fall down from exhaustion”.

Another symbolic element in hunters’ performance is the hunters’ imitation of wild animals during the fast dance. The intensification of tempo of music can be interpreted as the attack of the hunter that drives the animals away. Most spirits in hunters’ cosmology take the form of wild animals and female humans.<sup>99</sup> These transformative processes are key elements of ritual performance as they coalesce to support transformations in experience and echo the sensory palpability of performance that draws on experience and emotions. That night was very intense and emotionally charged. The efficacy of the music ensemble to deliver an outstanding performance and the praising skills of Solo to challenge and compel many hunters to dance, made hunters

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<sup>99</sup> Gender transformations also happen in Mande as Kassim Kone has argued in his article “When Male Becomes Female and Female Becomes Mali in Mande” (2004).

and the public to ask for more music and songs. The students of Solo were getting tired and Lansine was relieved of his duty as the second nkoni player:



Fig. 18 (L): Hunter dancing the quick dance to Lansine's playing, in Faraba. In the background hunters are watching, seated, under a tree (February 2011).

Fig. 19 (R): Hunter dances the quick dance in front of the ensemble. In the background women and children are standing, cheering and applauding (June 2010).

*Just before 01:00, Adama replaces Lansine on the nkoni. Lansine picks up the voice mic from a student of another donsonkonifola who is present here (they did not perform but they did dance a lot...). Solo sings for a few young men (in plain clothes), who get up and dance. Nfali comes to greet me. All this time he was sitting on a mat next to the desk. Many young boys and men are around me and greet me too. I am the attraction of the evening to them: the white man in hunters' clothes who speaks Bamanankan and takes photos. On top of it all, most hunters greet him passionately...*

*At 01:10 am Solo is about to finish his last tour. Most of the old hunters are gone and the people too. There are a few left along with many women and children. And then*



*he does the same he did last summer when I first saw him here in Bamako. He goes up to the women who all sit on the left of the mixing desk and starts to sing for our woman host and her friends. The rhythms he uses are unknown to me apart from the siraba that they also dance. He sings about women's hardship and effort to please their men, to prepare the food and do the housework. The crowd is in ecstasy. They all clap their hands throughout the praising and then, when Solo rises from his knees they follow him to the arena to dance. The young hunters and young men follow the women to the dance and they all dance the quick one together. For five minutes the arena looks like a disco heaven.*

These public events for 'pure' entertainment are open events. Here young men, women, children can participate by dancing to hunters' songs specifically dedicated to them by the donsonkonifola. This specific event provides evidence for that. Young hunters display their dancing skills, attracting the attention of musicians. They become potentially praised in the future. Young men express their interest to donsoya and respect to the hunters' brotherhood. Young unmarried women convey their appeal to young unmarried hunters and regard them as potential husbands. Older women and men admire hunters in performance and keep referring to them as holders of the true Mande (and by extend Malian) cultural tradition and identity.



Fig. 20: Women dancing to Solo's performance in the village of Dama in Jitumu (April 2010).

A *ɲɛnɛ* event becomes what Victor Turner (1986) calls ‘social drama’ or ‘cultural performance’, a ‘metaperformance’, which discusses ‘social metacommentaries, those reflexive genres through which cultures “can look honestly” at themselves, a necessity of survival as much as aesthetics’ (ibid: 122 in Conquergood 1989: 86). He also argues that:

cultural performances [including media texts] are not simple reflectors or expressions of culture or change, representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting ‘designs for living’ (Turner 1986: 24)

Hunters’ performances like the one described here reflect the contemporary Malian society in Bamako, how Malians see themselves in relation to modernity and rapid changes that they seem to be concerned of. Hunters’ image and ethos is in public display and is appreciated. Musicians, as creative actors, embody such ethos, they perform their identity as hunters and as public moralisers, inspiring the public and aspire for a better and more prominent future. Eventually every event comes to an end and that night:

*At 01:40 the music stops. We call it a night and get back to the car. People come to congratulate Solo. A couple of hunters are still here and wish me goodnight. Joli (Solo’s friend), who has been sitting all this time just behind the ensemble, joins the gang. There seems to be a problem with something that’s been missing. I get undressed along with the other apprentices and when Solo says so, we get in the car. All seven of us: Solo, Joli and Lansine with his nkoni in the front and Namani, Brulay, Adama and me with Solo’s nkoni at the back. It takes me a while to fit. I feel very uncomfortable and I have no idea how the ones in the front feel like (Joli has the figure of Ella Fitzgerald).*

*We take Joli home and wait for her to bring a tape to Solo. He puts it on. There is some *ɲɛ* nkoni playing (on the other side there is some sort of French transmission that everyone finds uninteresting). At the last red light at CAN square the engine stops working. We push the car out of the way and in the middle of the square. Cars pass buy and greet us: *! Dansɔɔ!* A taxi stops. The engine has been overheated. Adama brings water three times. The taxi man is very helpful and explains how this happened. A blue*

*police truck stops to see if we need further help and in the meantime stops a couple of taxis for control. The policemen are all very young, kind and helpful. I watch them all joke with each other: policemen, hunters and the taxi driver. The latter tells us that he had spotted them before he stopped for us further ahead and he made a circle to avoid them. Good thing they did not ask for his papers.*

*The engine is up and running and they tell me to get in. I insist that I walk these last 100 meters. Adama says it is not right to walk at this time of the night in Bamako. Solo insists, so I get in. The engine stops again, but luckily restarts. We arrive at the house. He tells me to ring. Apparently everyone is asleep. We are both worried, tired and pissed off. He bangs the metal door over and over again. Finally a guy appears from across the street, rings a phone number and another guy opens the door from the inside (!). I am speechless but grateful and wish everyone goodnight. I go straight to bed and fall asleep...*

## **CONCLUSION**

During my fieldwork I took part in many hunters' performances on different occasions: sacred and secular, sacrificial and celebratory, for hunters only or including the general public. I watched, observed, made recordings, took photos, filmed, played music and even attempted to dance trying to accommodate my fellow hunters' desires and needs.<sup>100</sup> It was important to me in order to understand the various aspects of their performances and to them that I experience what it means to be part of the ensemble, the brotherhood and the wider community in Bamako and in villages. My experiences were informed by informal discussions and more formal interviews with my teachers and mentors, namely Solo and Sekouba but also hunters, other musicians and apprentices, and various members of the community.

In this chapter I have contrasted the sacred kabani ceremony with the secular furu. I have chosen these particular events for a number of reasons. Kabani was the first sacred ritual I came across during fieldwork. In that sense it is very important to me. It was also away from Bamako, required a three-day trip and our ensemble was part of a delegation of hunters from Bamako. It was unique because of its locality and frequency: it happens annually in Kangaba. However, it had a common characteristic with other

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<sup>100</sup> Ethics are discussed in the Introduction to the thesis.



sacred ceremonies I attended like *bələbə* and *kunsi*; it was followed by a public event, organised by the hunters association that involved a musical performance.

*Furu* in Ngomiranbougou, on the other hand, was chosen for its successful, joyous and participatory elements. Here Solo was at home. We were surrounded by friends and family; all hunters were known to us; the newlyweds and their family were enthusiastic with Solo and very appreciative to the hunters. Moreover, although the quality of the sound was not great, it was certainly much better than the one at the public event that followed *kabani*.<sup>101</sup> As already mentioned, I felt more comfortable with my understanding of the actions and the tension around me in the performance space and this beautifully contrasted my enthusiasm but relative ignorance at the start of my fieldwork.

*Kabani* and *furu* are very distinct from each other, yet similar. The first is a sacred, hunters only ceremony; the second is a public one with the inclusion of non-initiates. They both contribute to the changing Mande world, by resisting it. Through song and dance, hunters negotiate their identities and display hunters' ethos, worldview and morality. The sacred ritual resists modernisation; it promotes traditional religious beliefs and practices; and interprets the future accordingly. It is very private by nature, but it is communicated among hunters in the most convincing way that shows communality and camaraderie. Then, it is shared with the people of Kangaba indirectly, through celebration.

The wedding party is highly public and shared. Although hunters are present to establish the importance and gravity of the marriage as a constitution, to be praised and invited to dance, it is the wider audience which participates with their screams, hand claps, laughter, movement, comments, cries, jokes, that turns the event into a celebration. That moment, the skill of the musicians, the presence of hunters and the audience promote solidarity and togetherness, turning their community of participants to 'communitas'. They share a common experience through hunters' performance.

My research observations, participation, and documentation proved that hunters' performance is a site of negotiation, where the reputation of hunters is challenged, their identity is communicated and established through praise song, and

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<sup>101</sup> The public event that night was unsuccessful; the sound system was very poor and broke down very early into the performance; the lights were very weak; and the electric generator failed after about an hour into the event. Solo got upset but continued performing 'unplugged' and singing his heart out. I filmed the event with the night-vision of my camera turned on, only to see how empty the site was and how disappointed the hunters were.

genealogies are recited for great hunters. Diana Taylor (2003; 2006) suggests that performance is a text very much like, and sometimes even more important than, written texts. She elaborates on the vital role of performance in making political claims, transmitting traumatic memory and forging cultural identity.<sup>102</sup> Hunters and their musicians indeed perform cultural memory and promote hunters' identity through song and dance, through narrative and sound, through movement and engagement with each other and with members of the audience. This is why their performances are always crowded with ordinary people. Hunters speak to them, address them and include them in their world during public ceremonies. Many of these events have been documented in a number of ways: audio recordings, video recordings and still photographs by various participants. The next chapter discusses such documentations in relation to the local hunters' music industry.

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<sup>102</sup> Mande hunters' performance has been used by the Malian state, which appropriates its representation of hunters' ethos and values (see Cashion 1984, Cisse 1994), especially during the celebrations of the anniversary of Mali's independence on the 22 September, with a hunters' parade and music playing. I explore this further in Chapter Six.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# RECORDING & PRODUCING HUNTERS' MUSIC

Through field recordings we are grounding ourselves in our various environments, musically, rather than maintaining music as a separate domain (Lockwood 2012: 26)

Field recordings are exceptional, important, beautiful! (Modibo Diallo 2011)

For music composer Annea Lockwood, listening to the environment in general is a process of connection; a tenacious system of connections and loops of energy flows and pulsations within the human body with those that animate the surrounding world. Environmental sounds – and sound recordings – offer an opportunity to tune in to physical processes that constantly shape individuals and the environment, and to recognise “the world as a web of diverse and coexisting energies enfolded within one vast rhythm” (Lockwood 2012: 26).

Hunters' music producer Modibo Diallo likes to record musicians in the countryside. He regards field recordings (*folikeyorɔ kaseti* or *concerti kaseti*)<sup>103</sup> as a way to preserve sound culture, to keep a record of events, ceremonies, history, and heritage. He is anxious about such cultural treasures perishing. He takes these recordings to a studio in Bamako, listens to them, selects the best parts for his releases and treats them to improve the sound whilst there. An educated young man who holds a university degree, Modibo learned this job from his father, Siriman. He does not want to do anything else but produce hunters' music. Even if he had to do another job for a living, he would make sure that he had enough spare time to be a music producer too. He is a producer determined to improve his job by employing new techniques and innovations.

This chapter is about hunters' music producers and how they interact with hunters' musicians in everyday and professional life. I begin with a brief history of the

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<sup>103</sup> These are live recordings made during music performances of hunters' ceremonies in, around and away from Bamako, the capital of Mali. *Folikeyorɔ* means 'performance site' and *concerti kaseti* translates as 'concert cassettes.'

hunters' music industry and developments in song aesthetics; discuss cassettes as cultural products of sound; the difficulties of being a hunters' music producer and how producers select their artists, record in the field and in the studio, and finally release albums; explain the logistics and legislation around contracts, payments and fees. I then describe a day in the studio with Solo and his producer, and point out the practice to go for or naming names. I move on to discuss the different media formats used in this music industry; the means for publicity; album sales and the issue of piracy and the *cassette locale*. Certain larger questions permeate all sections of this chapter: What is the effect of the recording industry upon hunters' musicians? How does identity become commodified in the process of selling cassettes? What kinds of identities are acceptable for commodification and why? Let me, however, start with some historical facts that took place during the last few decades in Bamako that are relevant to the discussion.

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUNTERS' MUSIC INDUSTRY**

It all began when Siriman Diallo moved from his hometown to Bamako to pursue a career as a music producer. Born in the village of Torolo in the Sebekoro section of Kita in Filadougou in 1948, Siriman started traveling back and forth to Bamako in 1963 but it was not until 1975 that he decided to move there permanently. He did a number of jobs before starting his cassette business in 1980s. His older brother, who traveled to the US, brought him a recording device. At the time, few recordists were at work in Bamako. When Siriman first started recording, people from BuMDA, the director of which at the time (1982) was Madou Couloubaly, confiscated Siriman's devices and warned him that he had to be a legitimate producer to make recordings, otherwise he would be a 'mere pirate'. He was also informed that marketing these recordings of 'folk music' was piracy. Siriman needed permission from BuMDA and had to pay taxes in order to become a proper and legitimate producer. So he approached BuMDA anew and was informed about the regulations and the special stickers that producers were obliged to stick on the covers of cassettes to certify their originality.

The director invited all recordists (around 15 people) involved in the recording and cassette business to come to BuMDA and register as recordists and producers of music. He then declared them as legitimate and allowed them to pursue their business. Producers at the time were interested in recording big orchestras such as Super Biton, Ensemble Instrumental du Mali and others. Siriman was the only one interested in

producing hunters' music. His colleagues used to make fun of him by stating that donsonkoni is not popular and that he would never make any money. However, Siriman's intention was not to make a living out of it. He wanted people to know what donsonkoni represents and means in their culture. Siriman came from a family of hunters and this also contributed to his decision to promote their music. A young, forward-looking man at BuMDA assured him that if he did his job right, then the music would sell.

Siriman got involved with hunters' musicians such as Batoma Sanogo (d.2005), Toumani Kone, Yaya Sangare, Sambouni Diakite, Yoro Sidibe, and Madou Sangare. He made recordings of their performances and released them. The recordings did so well that he paid 200,000 FCFA just for copyright to the musicians. He then added more artists to his list, such as Sadie Diakite (d.1986) and Hamady Diarra from Kayo in the Koulikoro region. Hamady was a short man and very uptight. When he performed, he wanted absolute attention and would start a fight in an instant if something bothered him; Siriman, as a producer from a lineage of hunters, knew how to handle such 'artistic temperaments'. He also worked with Blenzo Toumani and, eventually, more than 50 additional musicians, young and old. At the beginning, sales were slow but eventually people started to realize the music's significance. By the time of my interview in 2007, sales were good. Siriman has produced more than 200 cassettes of his own recordings excluding the recordings he got from the sound archives of ORTM. All these cassettes are donsonkoni recordings. When he first started, piracy troubled him a lot. Sales were low and he had no funds. However, things changed and since 2002 he is the most successful producer in Mali, in terms of sales. Siriman was also a frequent victim of piracy, especially with regard to the albums of Yoro Sidibe.

At the beginning of his career, Siriman used blank tapes to make cassette copies but that changed the moment he acquired his license from BuMDA. Today, before going in the studio, the artists sign a contract and Siriman pays the copyright fees. He does not own a recording studio and makes the most of his recordings in Studio Bogolan in Quinzambougou with French technician and music arranger, Yves Wernert (a former bass player from Nancy), but he had also made recordings in Radio Mali at the ORTM premises with technician Barou Kouyate. Today, there is much competition and one can get a good deal due to the plethora of recording studios.

Siriman uses the copying and printing facilities of Mali K7 to manufacture his cassettes and then he hands them over for distribution. Apart from owning the most well equipped recording studio (Bogolan), and cassette manufacturer, Mali K7, is also a record label with hundreds of releases of popular music, and the main distributor of music in Mali. It was run by Philippe Berthier (another Frenchman) and the universally renowned musician Ali Farka Toure. Following Ali Farka's death and Philippe's retirement, the future of the organization looks uncertain.

In the past, musicians used to travel abroad to record their albums. There were different recording studios and record labels in countries such as the Ivory Coast and Liberia. Their albums, in vinyl LP format and later during the 1980s on cassette, would be released locally and then imported to Mali. The only recording studio in the country at the time was the one of Radio Mali. The first private studio and cassette factory in Mali were both established and run by Philippe Berthier in 1989. The name of the enterprise was called "Ou Bien" Productions. In 1992 the company struck a deal with EMI, which already had subsidiaries in Nigeria and the Ivory Coast. EMI pulled out of Africa in 1995 (only keeping a base in South Africa). It was then that Philippe went into business with Ali Farka Touré. Ali had just won a Grammy Award and they set up "Mali K7" together.

Mali K7 started operating in 1994 and took a while before it became fully operational. So Siriman, for his first releases, had to mass-produce cassettes in Liberia, where a man from India called Supasan made them under the label Super Zonda. Malian producers used to take their recordings to Supasan and order the number of copies that they wanted; when ready, copies were dispatched via air to Bamako and through customs they ended up in BuMDA where they were counted before being delivered to the producers. This protocol assured that the agreed number of copies have entered the country legally and taxes were paid accordingly.

Siriman produces hunters' music for the world to hear. Throughout his career, he has produced all three hunters' music styles but tends to specialize in the Wasulu donsonkoni. He claims that it is the most popular by far because everyone can understand the language with ease. Batoma Sanogo, a hunters' musician from Segou on Siriman's list, for example, is popular and very well respected by all Malians. His cassettes sell more than the cassettes of the rest of Bamana donsonkonifolaw but he cannot match the Wasulu singers in popularity. The Bamana donsonkonifolaw do not

attract as wide an audience and only the Bamana regions listen to this style of donsonkoni. According to Siriman, since the passing of Batoma, no one in those regions is writing new songs, nor could they match Batoma's knowledge of the histories and the epics. Siriman had already put out four cassettes by him and was preparing a fifth from recordings made by Radio Mali; Batoma gave his own copies to Siriman with permission to release them.

According to Modibo, Siriman decided to become the producer *par excellence* of hunters' music, a musical genre restricted to initiated hunters, to immortalise it and make it known all over the world. He started releasing already recorded tapes from the archives of Radio Mali by artists such as Batoma Sanogo, Toumani Kone and Sadjé Diakite. He also persuaded Sambouni Diakite to switch from a professional career as a xylophone player to hunters' music and produced many of his cassettes. Siriman was always proud to record musicians from his native land, like Sambouni.

Traditional musical genres were not very popular among the citizens of Bamako who preferred modern popular music. So, there was limited interest in hunters' music at the beginning. Radio Mali was the first radio station to record musical traditions and national television (ORTM) was the first to show them on screen. Today, 'Terroir' the two-hour show on Malian culture and traditional music is one of the most popular shows on television. Its crew, along with presenter Ibrahim DaMonzon Diarra, travel around the country filming customs and ceremonies of different ethnicities including many hunters' events. Siriman's efforts are, in part, responsible for this transformation.

Prominent hunters' musician Solo does not remember the exact year that the hunters' music production began but when he started playing the nkoni, there were already plenty of cassettes around by Yoro Sidibe, Yaya Sangare, Toumani Kone and others. Yoro started releasing cassettes in 1984-5 and Solo in 2000. He is certain though that at the beginning many people feared the donsow and their music. Later, Solo claimed, people started to understand what the donsonkoni music is all about and realised that it could be pleasing for non-hunters and non-somaw alike.

## **AESTHETICS IN SONG & CHANGE**

It is the words that make the song. If you play good but the words that come out of your mouth are bad then your song will not attract many people (Siriman Diallo 2007).

A donsonkonifola should be singing about the famous donsow of all the regions in his recordings. He should sing for a great hunter from a certain village who killed a specific animal or did a heroic act but should not limit himself to just one hunter. If he sings about just one hunter, people will never buy his cassettes, Siriman explained. Over the years Siriman has worked with many musicians, “too many to cope!” He has produced their cassettes and helped them in many ways. He claims that the reason for this large number of musicians is that students ask their karamogow to ‘release’ them after two or three years of apprenticeship so they can sing and profit on their own. As a result, the apprentices may be capable of playing the *nkoni* but they cannot sing ‘good words’ (*kuma duman fo*), the words that are aesthetically appropriate for such praise songs. Siriman asserts that in a village there maybe more than forty young men who start a donso apprenticeship but most of them will quit. As he puts it, “You can find a hundred musicians who can play the *nkoni* but not a single one of them are competent in singing. A donsonkonifola has to create something new but at the same time stick to the tradition.”

Yves Wernert suggested many times to Siriman that he should modernise hunters’ music, but he repeatedly declined. Producers like Mama Konakeou and Modibo are not necessarily initiated hunters but Siriman is initiated to the National Federation of hunters. Siriman is a conservative man who struggles to keep the tradition alive and will do anything for that. He does not want to change it. He thinks that when the day arrives musicians, hunters and producers will modernize donsonkoni but, for now, they need to stick to the tradition (*laada*). It pleases him because there is no *manamanakan* (useless language, empty words) in the songs. Yet today, the new donsonkonifolaw sing exactly what Siriman would call ‘empty words’. Instead of ‘talking’ about the forest business, they sing like the *jeliw*, the griots. They demand things from the hunters just like the *jeliw*. “This is not donsonkoni!”

It is not just the music that is at stake. The very notion of donsoya is in danger. As Siriman explained, in his village when he was young he used to wear hunters’ clothes (*donso fini*) and go into the forest but he had never killed a bird! He used to accompany an old hunter into the bush. He carried the water flask, a sign of respect and apprenticeship, and would help the hunter carry small game back to his village. When he started his training as a young apprentice in 1963, he also started travelling to



Bamako. “Today,” he stated, “many men dress like donsow but they are not. They don’t even know where the bush is.” They do so because of the popularity and prestige that hunters carry, as powerful and extraordinary individuals. They seek to blend with them and profit through the brotherhood and new relationships.

## **CULTURAL PRODUCTS OF SOUND**

I consider Mande hunters’ music cassettes as commodities, and regard them as cultural products of sound of which the cultural regime of authentication and expertise is enhanced by popular understanding about ritual efficacy and folk criteria of authenticity.<sup>104</sup> Popular and public kinds of verification and confirmation complement the ‘province of experts and esoteric criteria’ (Appadurai 1986: 46). Cassettes make traditional music known everywhere and show that these musical genres are surviving. Cassettes can travel the world and make this music known in the remotest places as my consultants explained. Solo believes that a tourist who buys a cassette and takes it away with him will play it for others who, in turn, may become interested in the music and the musician. Therefore, the expansion of musical knowledge and production is facilitated through the use of cassettes, as well as radio and television shows.

Solo’s first three albums were produced by Mama Konakeou, the fourth and fifth by Modibo Diallo. Solo expresses indifference about producers and distributors as he is more concerned with the recording process. When the time feels right and all

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<sup>104</sup> Appadurai (1986:1) considers commodities as things distinct from ‘products,’ ‘objects,’ ‘goods’ or ‘artifacts,’ with a particular type of social potential. Commodities have economic value but, as Simmel argues, that is never an inherent property, while exchange is the source of value and not vice versa (ibid: 56). Although commodities are exchanged through economic means, their value is determined reciprocally. Although found in many societies, they are prominent in large scale, capitalist societies and are distinct from gifts: “Gifts, and the reciprocity, sociability, and spontaneity in which they are typically exchanged, usually are starkly opposed to the profit-oriented, self-centred, and calculated spirit that fires the circulation of commodities” (ibid: 11). Furthermore, commodities’ socially relevant feature is their exchangeability (past, present or future) for some other thing. Politics, in the sense of relations, assumptions and contests pertaining to power, is what links value and exchange in the social life of commodities. The process of exchange signifies and constitutes relations of privilege and social control. As Appadurai points out, what is political about this process is the “constant tension between the existing frameworks (of price, bargaining, and so forth) and the tendency of commodities to breach these frameworks” (ibid).

Commodities have life histories (Kopytoff 1986 in Appadurai 1986) and are culturally regulated. Their interpretation is open to partially individual manipulation. Commodities represent complex social forms and distributions of knowledge (ibid: 41). Crudely said, there are two types of knowledge: the one that goes into the production of the commodity and the one that goes in its consumption. Hence it is useful to look at the distribution of knowledge at various points of their lives. With all commodities, technical knowledge is ‘always deeply interpenetrated with cosmological, sociological, and ritual assumptions that are likely to be widely shared’ (ibid: 42) but there is also another dimension of the production of knowledge, that of *the market, the consumer and the destination of the commodity*. Discontinuities in the destination of the commodity are caused by problems involving authenticity and expertise. Such matters revolve around the issues of good taste, expert knowledge, ‘originality’, and social distinction (Benjamin 1968; Bourdieu 1984).

preparations have been made, the producer will summon the musician and his ensemble in the studio to record. Donsonkonifolaw like to release cassettes: their primary aim is to be known, to reach audiences far from where they are based even if they are not able to travel to distant towns to perform.

Maliens have the impression that the nkonifolaw make money with these releases, but that is not the case as Solo explained, “We have no penny on us!” The money from cassette sales is never enough to sustain a living. His first three releases were not profitable. He earned 3,000 to 4,000 FCFA per release but in 2010, he made 50,000 FCFA (around £60) on the fourth. The only advantage of these releases is that people get to know the artist “even if he has not been to their homes.”

## **TRADITION AND EXPERTISE**

The nkoni players rush on me because I am an expert in music production. I am the initiator of the hunters’ music industry. I know what I am doing. No matter where the artist goes, he will finally come to me. I attend ceremonies; I see many things; I see how events happen. Therefore musicians and I can easily understand one another and exchange ideas. I give guidelines to them about many things. Successful work does not depend on getting just a better sound. Producing requires cooperation between all the actors involved. My recording technique is important too; the system I use to achieve better recording conditions is important; the studio I use has an impact on the quality of sound. I am an expert in recording. I know the profession. It’s my profession. I acquired much knowledge in the field. I’ve been doing this job for many years and am gaining more and more experience. I am always ready to work with musicians and will never be discouraged. That is why artists come to me. It is not because of my kindness, it’s not because I am more intelligent than the other producers, it is not only because of the quality of my sound. It is because I know well what I am doing. I am an expert! (Siriman Diallo 2007)

Siriman in declaring himself an expert, claims that he is a specialist, a virtuoso, a master, a person with a comprehensive and authoritative knowledge in the field of hunters’ music and its industry. He is a knowledgeable, initiated hunter, a pioneer, an

explorer, in total accordance with *donsoya* which expects hunters to explore new territories, found new towns, discover new sites and map landscapes. Siriman also claimed to be an experienced music producer who, unlike other producers who are not hunters, is treating his artists as his equals and his brothers, again, in accordance with the laws of *donsoya*. Hence, he is open to ideas and to him that is the most fruitful aspect of his relationship with his artists. He is also a professional, who knows his way in the studio. He has his signature sound and a long history of recording. He is also very welcoming towards new artists. However, even for experts such as Siriman, producing is a profession confronted by challenges.

Difficulties may arise with conservative musicians who refuse to work with any producer. They do not want their repertoire recorded and released on cassettes. Although musicians know their potential to convey messages that can benefit society they are also holders of secrets of their cultural patrimony which they do not want to reveal. To convince such artists that it is ethically and morally acceptable to release their music on cassettes is a difficult task for producers. Today, this is changing, as my consultants informed me. Musicians start to realise that it is not necessary to reveal secret knowledge in recordings and understand their responsibility as public moralisers to pass their messages to the public through cassettes.

Another difficulty is certain musicians' greed, Modibo explained. They ask for compensation that producers are unable to meet. They might ask for large sums of money, land or vehicles. These individuals relent over time as they talk to other musicians and find out about the actual fees that producers are offering.

As Modibo pointed out, musicians without previous experience in the studio may waste time and money. Studios are paid by the hour and, while it is common for an ensemble to finish recording an album in a couple of hours, these musicians may require up to four days to complete the recording.

However, the producer's job has been made easier for a number of reasons. Over time, musicians realise that releasing albums is a matter of stakes. Some even do it for free, claiming only fame as Modibo explained. Since the hunters' festival organised by former Minister of Culture, anthropologist Pascal Baba Couloubali in 2001, hunters' music has become very popular. People appreciate the messages it contains. This festival was a notable success as it "took the *nkonifolaw* out of darkness", making them known to the wider public. It also exposed producers to new or obscure musicians and

inspired young men to become apprentices to master musicians. So, how do musicians and producers, approach each other to negotiate a working relationship? It seems that the collection of background information is a key factor in the process.

## **COMING TOGETHER**

Modibo uses different means to gather information about *donsonkonifolaw*. His father has extensive experience and collaborates with numerous artists, giving him access to a substantial pool of musicians who already have recorded with Siriman. In order to find new artists for his own record label, he exploits the media. He comes across new names through television shows and radio programmes. The presenters of nationally transmitted shows are government officials funded by their institution, ORTM and they travel all over the country to collect new material. Private radio station presenters travel too, although not very far, at the expense of hunters' associations to attend hunters' ceremonies and events. All these agents report back to Bamako with new or obscure acts that attract the interest of young Modibo. He is exposed to musicians that he has never seen or heard before.

He also uses his relationship with hunters and other musicians who give him information about worthwhile *nkonifolaw* to record. He goes to their performances to judge for himself, to watch, listen and experience the performances of these suggested artists. He does the same when a musician approaches him and asks to be recorded. Many young *nkonifolaw* come to his shop to discuss the possibility of such collaboration. As he vividly put it, "The artists look for us and we look for them."

Producers select their artists according to two criteria: 'popularity' and 'originality'. The artists can be either accomplished and established master musicians who know the *donsonkoni* repertoire and play the 'traditional' style or they can be new musicians who have their own style but who, nevertheless, are popular among audiences. The former are considered 'professionals' and the latter 'amateurs'. The 'professional' musicians are not necessarily well known but producers consider them important enough as holders of the tradition.

Solo chooses to work with producers who are knowledgeable and professionals. One of whom is Siriman Diallo, an expert in *donsoya*. Mama Konakeou, on the other hand, started producing *donsonkoni* music recently and his first artist was Sekouba Traore, one of Yoro Sidibe's students. Siriman had produced Sekouba earlier when he

was not that famous. When Sekouba became popular, he chose to work with Mama. The latter does not know much about donsoya and chooses to work with artists who are popular so he can profit from the sales. Unfortunately, Mama was not what Solo needed, especially at the beginning of his recording career. He proved to be reckless and dishonest with him, as my consultants claimed. He kept his stock low and as a result people could not find Solo's cassettes in the market, not even in his two record shops in Bamako. Solo did not make any serious money either. He remembers only once getting 4,000 FCFA from Mama and then 2,500 FCFA or 2,000 FCFA, although Mama always claimed that the cassettes were selling well. Solo was very optimistic about Modibo, who seemed to be honest and hardworking, 'a clean person' who does things properly.

## **PERMISSION TO RECORD**

It is the artist who gives permission to have his work recorded (Modibo Diallo 2011).

These recordings can be made in different settings: in the field and in a recording studio. People who usually make field recordings are either producers who want to release a performance on cassette, compact disc or DVD; or radio presenters who attend performances and want to play them in their radio shows; or sound technicians who may want them for their archives. All these professionals need permission from the artists in order to record live performances but it is only the producers who work with signed contracts with the artists as I explain later on.

In the case of radio presenters, things work differently. There is an association of radio presenters in Bamako that works very closely with the donsonkonifolaw. Both sides have agreed that the presenters can come to hunters' performances, record the music freely and then play it in their shows. Independent recordists always need permission from the musicians to proceed with the recording. If the artist's producer is on site, he might have a say in this. Usually, unless a song is about to be released on his label, he will give permission to the recordist. If songs have not yet been released, they will not be recorded for fear of piracy. Producers always advise their artists not to sing such songs in public prior to their release on cassettes. It is not unusual though to see many young men record performances on their mobile phones that they may later share

with their friends. The quality of these recordings depends on their devices and is often poor. These cannot be used for piracy and so the artists let them indulge freely.

It is very common for the producers to use their own field recordings and turn them into ‘industrial cassettes’ or proper releases. Siriman and Modibo Diallo have used this method for numerous recordings of Yoro Sidibe. There is an unavoidable obstacle in such recordings: the sound system. Let me turn to such technologies, specifically, sound and recording equipment.

## **TECHNOLOGIES: SOUND AND RECORDING EQUIPMENT**

Heidegger’s thesis concerning technology is exemplified in works such as *Being and Time* (1962/1927) and his 1954 lecture “The Question Concerning Technology.” He explores the essence of technology through its relationship with human existence. In Heidegger’s version of phenomenology the intentional arc of ‘*human-existence relation-world*’ is interpreted existentially and technology is understood as a means to an end but also as a human activity. Heidegger links technology to the Greek *Techne* which stands for not only the activities and skills of the craftsman but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. It is also linked to *episteme* (science) as a mode of truth as bringing to presence (Idhe 2010: 29-33). Idhe (1990: 1) claims that our existence is technologically textured and regards technologies as those artifacts of material culture that humans use in various ways within their environment. He sees technologies not only as scientific but also as cultural instruments that affect the ways we act, perceive and understand in what Edmund Husserl in his *Crisis in European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology* has called, the “lifeworld.” Developments of a technology determine future directions for the socius.

In Mali, such technologies interweave sociocultural relations. Hunters and non-hunters alike use these cultural instruments to share and communicate music and information between them. Especially with the introduction of private radio stations and the emergence of the hunters’ music industry, hunters’ musicians get recorded, enjoy airplay and advertise their albums and concerts. Hunters gain information about events in and around Bamako, but also in other areas where radio stations operate. Hunters’ music producers and record presenters seek to record events and hunters’ musicians get invited into recording studios to make albums. Technologies not only facilitate such

processes but bond professionals together in meaningful relationships. Hunters welcome such intervention as a way to preserve, transmit and disseminate their cultural heritage.

In the past, hunters' performances were not amplified and there was no PA system present on site. Voices and instruments alike were natural and no microphones were used. This facilitated recording in the sense that there was no distortion of sound. Recordings would usually be clear depending on the competence and technique of the recordist. Recordists usually sit in front of or next to the singer and place their devices close to his mouth to capture the singing but at the same time they are able to capture the sound of the harp loud enough to be audible but lower in volume in comparison to the voice so the words are loud and clear. In addition, the recording device captures the sound of the second harp and the iron scraper along with the background vocals on a level that is lower than the lead singer and his nkoni, producing a mix that is balanced and pleasing. The recordists follow the ensemble around the performing space keeping up with their movements, a task that is difficult to achieve, especially if they are numerous, as is usually the case. Today, the same method is used to record hunters' performances but these contemporary recordings have to cope with the sound system.



Fig. 21: Hunters' musician Inzan Kone surrounded by radio presenters recording his performance for a soma (July 2009).

Sound systems come in different kinds, sizes and types but they are all used to amplify the sound of the ensemble, or rather the voice of the lead singer and his harp. Up to a maximum of three microphones may be used: one for each harp and another for

the singer. Two stacks of loudspeakers are placed in opposite corners of the performing area. The sound from the speakers blends with the ensemble's sound and as the latter moves around with microphones, feedback and noise is produced. This is expected as receivers (microphones) and transmitters (loudspeakers) come face to face constantly. As a result, good quality field recordings are hard to attain and most of such cassette releases sound muddy, unbalanced and distorted.

Field recordings are made using inexpensive analogue devices, the favourite being the SONY TCM-150 cassette recorder. It is considered the most portable and reliable costing around 15,000 FCFA. A few radio presenters use digital voice recorders of different brands such as Olympus and Philips and only one, Ibrahim DaMonzon Diarra of ORTM, uses an old professional four-track analogue cassette recorder by TASCAM but with just one stereo microphone. The digital files of the voice recorders are always mp3 of the lowest quality possible for the economy of space in the memory cards, the capacity of which is one or two gigabits.

## **THE CONTRACT**

Nothing can be done without a contract (Solomane Konate 2011)

In order to proceed with a studio recording that will eventually find its way to the market, the producer and the artist will have to make an agreement that is sealed with a written and signed contract. As Modibo said, it is impossible to release a cassette without a signed contract between producer and artist. Three copies will be produced and signed by both parties at the mayor's office (La Mairie) in front of legal officers. Artist and producer will keep one copy each while the third will be left in the Bureau Malien du Droit d'Auteur.

Usually, a contract lasts for three years and bonds producer and artist with fourteen articles. The artist gives all legal rights of the songs to be recorded to his producer and is not allowed to sing the same songs for another producer for as long as the album is in circulation in the market. If the producer decides not to continue with second or third editions, when his stock dies out, the artist can re-record the same songs for another producer, providing that the three-year period of his contract has expired.



The artist cannot pass the same songs to another artist either, to record with a different producer. All this is explained in the contract.

The producer is bound to deliver the album and have it in the market at a given date. In case of delay he must inform the artist who may decide to break the contract. Solo signed such a contract in order to be part of Modibo Diallo's group of artists. I was there at the time and able to go through the details and conditions of the contract as described above and elaborated in the following sections.

## **BUREAU MALIEN DU DROIT D'AUTEUR**

The artists' copyright agency is situated at the neighbourhood of Falaje in Bamako. It is a small office with a couple of assistants who handle matters of copyright for composers, musicians and singers. The way this system works is both complicated and incomplete. As I was informed by the assistants there, they were still working towards a more effective way to secure control and deliver the copyright fees to their partners. Such discussion though is beyond the scope of this thesis. What is relevant here is that no cassettes or CDs can be made and released in the market legally without the authorisation of BuMDA. No factory can proceed to the manufacturing of the copies without this. The number of copies the producer wishes to manufacture is clearly stated at the Office and a fee is paid by the producer in order to acquire a special watermark sticker for each copy. This silver-gold sticker that glitters in light distinguishes an original copy from a pirated copy of the album (cassette or compact disc) and costs 90 FCFA each. It pictures the head of a hippo with his mouth open inside a frame in the shape of Mali, and is surrounded by the name of the Office in block capital letters. At the bottom there is a serial number relating to each release. They call it *dolonin yeledi*, 'the little smiling star.'

This fee is 9 percent of the wholesale price of the recording (roughly 800-850 FCFA). On the market, "original" cassettes are sold for 1.000 FCFA. Of this 90 FCFA, 15 percent goes to the state in taxes, 15 percent goes to operational costs at BuMDA, and 5 percent goes to artists administered by BuMDA. This leaves 65 percent for the artist, or 58 FCFA per cassette sold on the market. This sum may in turn be individually dispersed according to specific percentages amongst the "artist," "composer," "arranger," and "editor" if such titles apply to different persons (Diakité 2006: 92 cited in Skinner 2012).

BuMDA keeps records of the number of copies for each release, the date they were made and the date of their release along with the number of cassettes sold and the remaining stock. These records are at the disposal of all parties to check and consult for any possible reason. BuMDA also serves as a mediator between artists and producers. It provides a form to be signed by both parties that allows them to become members and cooperate with each other. BuMDA handles disputes between artists and producers. If one party is not pleased with the other, BuMDA will settle the matter. BuMDA always tries to solve problems in a friendly way, but in the case of serious disputes which cannot be settled there, BuMDA recommends that these be taken to Court. As a prime authority, the Court can cancel a contract.

### **BREAKING THE CONTRACT**

A contract can be cancelled if things go wrong but it can also be renewed. The producer has to inform the artist in writing about the cancellation of a contract. This is necessary in case the artist decides to sign a contract with another producer. It can also be used as proof that the artist is not currently engaged with a producer. By the time of this research no contract had been cancelled between Siriman and Modibo, and their artists. Modibo is advocating freedom for his artists. He believes that they should sign with the best producer for their needs, as he noted, “the producer must be tolerant and leave the artists do as they please.”

Contracts last for three years. After this period, both parties can break the contract and part ways or, if they are content in their business relationship, then they can renew the contract for another album. Complaints can be made at BuMDA and taken into account by this authority, who will then intervene to rectify the unpleasant situation. Solo expressed his dissatisfaction in working with Mama Konakeou many times to me but he did not solve this problem through BuMDA. He visited Mama in his house and discussed the situation with him. He was facilitated by his friend and Moribabougou FM radio presenter Issa Toure, and myself. Issa gave extensive advice and Mama graciously agreed that their contract was over as three years had passed and ‘released’ Solo. Solo was free to work with whichever producer he wanted to. He wished him a long and successful career. Solo was very relieved that this thorny issue was finally resolved. A few days later Solo received a signed document by Mama that

stated the above, which meant Solo could use it to testify to his availability and sign a new contract with Modibo.

Before the signing, Solo, Issa and myself went to look for Modibo at his neighbourhood in South Bamako. Madu Diarra, the hunter's music show presenter at Radio Benkan, was waiting for us there. We sat just across from a photo shop and Modibo Diallo soon joined us. He looked in a good mood and happy to see us all together. The presenters talked first (Issa then Madu) then Modibo, then Solo, then Modibo again. Modibo liked the idea of working with Solo. For some unknown and private reason, his father, Siriman, never kept his promise to work with Solo, so a contract was never signed. Solo always felt disappointed about this fact but had high hopes this time. He had consulted the sand and the signs were favourable. He expected to be treated with the respect that accomplished master musicians deserve. Modibo, younger and successful as a producer with a rich background in the hunters' music scene, was very confident of himself. He is a man that knows what he wants and what he needs to do in order to accomplish his goals. The two men respected these qualities in each other.

Negotiations started with the two radio presenters presenting the case to all of us. There was a matter that had to be settled because they saw much potential in such collaboration. Both Solo and Modibo deserved the best of luck and success; they were suited for each other. Modibo expressed how keen he was to be Solo's new producer. Modibo considered Solo as part of Yoro Sidibe's family of students, with whom both Siriman and Modibo share a fruitful collaboration. So he was happy to welcome Solo to his own family of recording artists. Solo on the other hand, was eager to work with Modibo because of Modibo's reputation as a producer: an expert, dignified and respectful professional. He felt that a contract with Modibo would advance his career and bring him fame and prosperity.

It was a very subtle and short negotiation. Both parties agreed that this collaboration would benefit everyone: profit for Modibo, income and popularity to Solo, new songs and rhythms to the tradition, and a new fresh and skilful *nkonifola* to the community of hunters and non-hunters alike. All that remained were a few technicalities. Modibo needed a copy of the form that Mama agreed to sign. He usually signed three-year contracts with all his artists that could be extended to five, and he

promised a copyright fee to Solo for every cassette copy that he sold. They were ready to start the minute Mama provided the signed document.

### **LOGISTICS: PAYMENTS, FEES AND EXPENSES**

Musicians negotiate fees among themselves. Since the ensemble consists of a master and his students, it is left to his discretion to reward them for the recording. In some cases this will involve payment with currency, in other cases it will mean other gifts or gratitude. The latter is much valued among apprentices. Regardless of reward, apprentices act like session musicians and do not benefit from any copyrights of the recording. After an agreement has been made, the master musician will inform the producer about it and they will proceed with the contract.

The fee that the producer pays the *donsonkonifola* varies and depends on the financial power of the producer and the quality of the musician's songs. Payment will come in advance, usually in cash. There are cases where the musician may ask for something different, a piece of land, domestic animals and so on. In any case this fee is called "Cache d'Enregistrement" (recording fee). It is mentioned in the contract and is different from the artist's copyright, which is paid by the producer to BuMDA. Some artists do not ask for payment because they only seek fame through the recordings. Modibo though is opposed to that. He thinks that even a symbolic fee should be applied, if only to please the musician, to make him happy and to acknowledge his efforts. Modibo gave 50,000 FCFA to Solo after the recording session as his reward for the process. Solo was pleased, as he had never gained more than 25,000 FCFA for all his previous recordings for Mama Konakeou.

Generally speaking, the producer pays for all expenses that a music production involves: studio time, artist's fee, the cover artwork, publicity of the release, advertising posters, samples of the album for airplay and distribution costs. Modibo, for example, paid the studio after the session, the sum of 50,000 FCFA. The producer has other things to take care of as well: transportation of the ensemble, the magnetic tapes in the studio and the cassettes that will be manufactured at the factory. He also has to pay copyrights to the artist. This is a fee per cassette. On top of that, as Modibo explained, the producer has to pay taxes to the state as a legitimate businessman. Finally, the producer decides on the price of the album at the market. This is also mentioned in the contract and at the time fieldwork it was 1,000 FCFA per copy.

## CHOOSING THE STUDIO

After an agreement is made and a contract is signed both by the artist and the producer, the latter may ask for a demo, *maquette* of the former with all the songs that he intends to include in his album. The demo is usually recorded in an analogue cassette recorder in the house of the artist. It is operated by one of the apprentices and there is no audience present apart from family members and friends who come and go during the session. The home recording is thus very informal and its only scope is to give the producer an idea of the songs the artist wishes to record in the studio. The cassettes that are used can be found at the market with the commonest being the Maxwell brand. The songs are usually new but may include older ones as well. After the recording is finished, the artist passes the cassette to his producer who listens to it and comes back with some feedback.

There are numerous recording studios in Bamako that offer a wide range of facilities and equipment. Their owners are frequently musicians. Solo has recorded in three different studios: Studio Yelen run by Baron Blenin in the neighbourhood of Hamdallaye, the studio of Kuna Kouassi in Torokorobougou and the Studio Bogolan of Ali Farka Toure in Quinzambougou, all of them in Bamako. Studio Bogolan is the studio of Mali K7 where many Malian stars have recorded: Mangala Camara, Oumou Sangare, Ali Farka Toure, Rokia Traore and Drissa Soumaoro to name a few. Modibo has worked in some others like Balanzan, Maikana, the studio of Mahamane Tandina and Bogolan. Studios charge different fees per hour. Bogolan is the most well equipped and up to date with both digital and analogue recording equipment and peripherals. It charges 50.000 FCFA per hour for a recording of hunters' music. Other studios charge less (25.000 FCFA) but lack in modern equipment.<sup>105</sup>

As Solo liked to say, getting information about the best equipped studio, more skilful sound technician or better sound rooms is a matter of relationship. All artists in Bamako know each other either directly or indirectly through friends and colleagues.

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<sup>105</sup> These are prices given to me by Modibo. They are estimates. One would probably get different prices if asked directly at the studios and/or other producers or artists. Prices may vary according to who is hiring the studio, his background, budget and nationality. Europeans and American producers and artists tend to be charged more than local ones. This is expected and acceptable.

They keep in constant contact and share experiences and gossip. Everyone knows when and where others are performing or recording and they tend to ask for information about new spaces and places. Artists would suggest a particular studio because of its incredible sound or delightful host. Producer and artist choose together. Some producers like Modibo tend to work in one studio, in this case Bogolan. Solo had not been there before but had heard rave reviews from friends and colleagues, so he happily agreed to record there.

In the following section I use my fieldnotes to describe the day that Solo and his students went into the studio to record two albums for Modibo Diallo's label. I then analyse my notes to show the different dynamics, hierarchies and contesting identities at play.

## **A DAY IN THE STUDIO**

On Saturday 19 June 2010 at 12:30 Solo rang me to say that Modibo Diallo had booked studio time for him to record an album and that we should all meet him downtown. The news came unexpectedly. I had been waiting for this moment for such a long time that I had almost given up. That morning I left home to go and spend some time at the city centre, wander the streets, blend with the crowd and pay friends a visit. I welcomed the news and informed Solo where I was and asked permission to return to the house to grab my recording equipment, camera and camcorder. I intended to document everything. Solo agreed to pick me up from the house in half an hour and I hurried to get a taxi back home.

During fieldwork, I kept my batteries charged so I did not have to worry about unforeseen events like this one. The house was empty; the women were visiting family and the children accompanied them. The housemaid was in the yard with her friends, all teenage girls gossiping between ball games and skipping rope. Solo arrived on time. I placed my rucksack in the trunk and sat in the back next to Brulay and Namani. Lansine and Modibo were waiting for us at the gas station and we all took off for Quinzambougou. It was only then that I realised it was the Studio Bogolan that we were heading to. The studio was situated behind an elegant furniture shop called 'Imagination' at the borders of Niarela and Quinzambougou neighbourhoods. We sat under a tin-roof kiosk with bamboo walls at the yard to wait for the technician. Meanwhile Solo started tuning the instruments while Modibo offered us (the students)

some water to drink and left the premises for a quick meal. We were discussing the football game of the day: Australia-Ghana. According to my fieldnotes:

*The tall technician arrives late at 14:20. His name is Eliezer Oubda and is from Burkina Faso. Modibo comes back from lunch and they move inside to prepare things. We grab our stuff and enter the studio. I have been here before in 2003. It is very cosy and well equipped studio with digital mixers (Yamaha) and PCs. A Macbook Pro like mine lies on the coffee table. There are Bamana masks hanging on the walls along with Fula hats and Bamana bogolan. Various stools are everywhere and the temperature is pleasant; there are air condition units in every room.*

*At 15:00 they start the setting up. All musicians are placed in the main room. There is another booth at the back, which will not be used. There are also moving panels to isolate musicians in the main room but will not be used either. The ensemble sits in a circle. Clockwise starting with Solo, follow Lansine, Namani and then Brulay. Eliezer and his assistant set up the microphones (Shure) for the recording. The ones for vocals are different from the ones aimed for the instruments. Solo's nkoni gets an extra piezo-electric pick up, which is placed on the bridge of the instrument. All in all: Solo gets an overhead microphone for his nkoni, another one for its resonator and finally, the pick up; Lansine gets an overhead for his nkoni; Namani gets one for his karijan; and Brulay gets one for his kutsuba. For the vocals, Solo, Lansine and Namani get one microphone each. Only Solo gets to wear headphones. As they are setting up, Modibo turns the air condition off for the noise. It soon becomes hot and he turns it on again until the recording starts. I take photos and ask Modibo if it is all right to stay in the recording room during the session. By all means, he responds, but not during the recording as this might distract the musicians. He wants them focused.*

*We leave the recording room and go to the control room to check signals. Modibo has Solo's phone and there is a call for him. He takes the phone to Solo and hands it to him. Every musician plays to test his microphone, first the instruments then the voices. After the sound check, the ensemble starts to play. Solo greets me in a song and we laugh. I think the sound is a bit dry. I decide to tell Eliezer and ask if he is recording directly into stereo. In fact he is. There will be no mixing, he says. What we hear now is what we will get at the end. But why use all these microphones then? To get a good mix before the recording, he responds and adds that there is no budget for a mix.*

*I tell them that Solo always asks for more bass and what I hear now is not going to please him at all. Eliezer is trying to fix things. We ask Solo if he likes the sound of his nkoni, if he wants more bass or what. He finally likes it. Modibo tells Eliezer to take out just a bit of bass because the studio monitors are dry anyway and since Solo will be soloing, we need to have a clear sound that the audience can understand. Lansine's nkoni on the other hand is allowed to have some more bass since he is playing only the rhythm. I wonder why we can't achieve a clear bass sound. Eliezer sees my point and is trying to explain things when Modibo leaves the room. "He is doing everything, you know, he is the manager, the producer, everything", he says. He tells me that he has put from Left to Right in Stereo: karijan, Lansine's nkoni, Voices, Solo's nkoni, kutsuba. He also mentions that it is only Solo who wears headphones because if all of them did they would get confused.*



Fig. 22: L-R: Namani, Solo, technician and Lansine in Studio Bogolan during the recording session for Solo's first release with Modibo Diallo's label (June 2010).

*The session starts [in Bamana are the names of the rhythms of the, then, untitled songs that were performed]:*

1. **Ntana**: *Modibo grabs the microphone in the control room, used to communicate with the artists in the recording room and starts to mention people's names to Solo's headphones so he can incorporate them in the song text. Modibo is standing up, dancing the slow hunters' dance, holding the microphone and*



*directing the ensemble with his hands: slower here, quieter there, take it to fade out. Eliezer is facebooking in the meantime and will continue doing so throughout today's session. He finally puts the recording time on the screen. This one lasts for 16 min.*

2. Numufoli: *A man comes in and asks about Solo; is it his first recording? Modibo says that he has been recording for others and asks for a blank page to take notes on the songs. I think the balance of the instruments in this track is better than the previous one and the percussion instruments are pleasantly louder. Modibo tells them to fade out.*
3. Ŋanakɔɔdonfoli: *As they start Solo's microphone drops on the ground and Eliezer goes to put it back. Issa Toure, Solo's friend and radio presenter, arrives and wants to know about the session. The percussion is low again, at least in my ears. Issa asks me what's wrong and I explain. He cannot hear it too. He tells Modibo who says that it is there but not too much so the audience will not be distracted by it and can focus on the voice.*



Fig. 23: L-R: Technician, Issa Toure and Modibo Diallo in the control room of Studio Bogolan during the recording session for Solo's first release with Modibo Diallo's label (June 2010).

**Break:** *Modibo goes in the recording room. Issa explains that it was he who Modibo called last night at 21:00 to notify about the recording session. He just happened to be chez Solo. He then went to the anniversary of Radio Bamakan where Sekouba Traore*

and Madu Sangare were playing. I tell him that I had never seen Sekouba. He will keep it in mind. If he knew I would be interested in a night like this he would have called me or stopped by to see if I had time to go. Tomorrow Solo is performing in Moribabougou for a celebration of the local radio station where Issa works. Modibo is back and the ensemble starts recording again.

4. **Somafoli:** *It is a fasa for Moustapha Diallo and Modibo speaks to the microphone the soma's name. Issa grabs the microphone to say something but Modibo stops him: "you cannot talk to him like that; I just said a name, not a story. He will be distracted." Modibo seems to have a very clear picture of what he wants in general and in particular, and orders the ensemble to stop (through Solo's headphones).*
5. **Numufoli:** *It is a fasa for Negesomfomba Kulikoro, Issa tells me. Modibo tells Eliezer to stop recording on the 45:00:00. It takes just a little longer to finish. No harm done.*
6. **Somafoli:** *It is a fasa for Moribabougou Babakane, Issa tells me. The balance of the instruments is fine here. At some point Modibo tells Solo "a ka nyi", it is good, meaning stop! Solo brings it to an end.*
7. **Juru 2010:** *It is a fasa for Gomi Seydou Jara. It is Solo's new creation, a new rhythm. Modibo is excited but I cannot hear the kutsuba. Issa asks Modibo about this and he responds that this way the nkoni rises from the mix. When the recording time reaches one hour, MODIBO tells them to stop.*

**Break:** *It is 16:55. We all have a smoke break outside and some go to the washroom. Issa tells me that Modibo will propose a second album to Solo right now! That is fantastic! What about the contract, I ask. We can talk about it afterwards. It has not been signed yet. It is perfectly acceptable to do these things the other way around, says Issa. Inside Modibo, Namani and Eliezer listen to the recording. The ensemble goes in for the second album. I spot a coffee machine in the corner of the control room with a number of mugs. All the musicians got so far is water...*

1. **Sogdotamekan:** *It is a fasa for Yoro Sidibe. Modibo gives instructions for the lead vocals. Solo lists all of Yoro's apprentices and friends like Siriman Diallo. Modibo adds a few names to the list for Solo to mention. He wants them to stop playing in 15 minutes. He also wants another new song and Solo starts one. After a few seconds Modibo stops them and says that they have played that one*

earlier on. He plays the already recorded song and it proves him right. There is laughter from everyone.

2. **Siraba:** they start with great enthusiasm and Modibo tells them to cool down. Solo sings for himself as a bird. He mentions my name and Modibo tells me that now I need to provide some meat.

**Break:** Issa gives a few names to Modibo so he can pass them to Solo: Solomane Ndao, Filabougou Seydou Doumbia and others.

3. **Bamanadankɔɔɓafoli:** It is a fasa for Bobougou Burama. The rhythm is a Bamana donsonkoni rhythm from Segu. It is played for Kings and brave men. It is Modibo who suggests the rhythm to Solo and is indeed a great one. We all move to it. Issa unfortunately is needed elsewhere and has to go. Modibo keeps giving directions and naming names: Solomane Ndao, Filabougou Seydou Doumbia, Baisu, Seina Keita, Kanekasamaden Yabu. He finally says “a ka nyi”, and the music stops.
4. **Komanagan:** It is a fasa for another hunter and was a request of Modibo.
5. **Somafoli:** This song has a name, Komanikoro. The ensemble starts to play but Eliezer is not recording because he is too busy facebooking. We laugh and start again. Modibo stops the recording when he thinks it is enough.
6. **Dununi:** Modibo verifies what he is hearing by asking Solo if it is Dununi. He suggests names for Solo to mention; Madu Kulubali, Bamana Seydou, Drissa Sangare and many more, even Radio Bamakan. I wonder why all these names.
7. **Donsokɛ Zangue Dai So:** Modibo asks Solo to play for just 5 minutes to complete another hour of recording. He also adds some names for Solo and then stops the music. He says, I Dansɔɔɔ, I ni ko. A banna. It has finished.

We all go outside for a smoke. Solo asks me if I liked it. I loved it. I am just too overwhelmed by the procedure. Eliezer starts mastering and I watch him destroy the decent bass sound we achieved earlier on. The sound becomes bright and percussive. I can now see why all of Siriman’s and Modibo’s productions sound the same. It is surely their aesthetic but also the perception that this way the music/sound will be clear enough for the people to understand. The voice is up front sometimes too loud with distortion. The lead nkoni is second to the voice in volume, dry, percussive and flat. The second nkoni is much lower in volume. The karijan is really low and the kutsuba is

*present only in a decent Hi-Fi system. All productions of Siriman and Modibo Diallo have fade-outs. I can now see why. The producer is notifying the musicians just a few seconds before his own imaginary ending of the music. It is inevitable that the musicians need more time to bring it to a decent end. Hence all endings today were clumsy and I bet that the releases will have fade-outs. Modibo has a clear vision about his productions and the authority to impose on his artists.*

*Modibo calls everyone outside. There is food to celebrate. On the kiosk's table lies a big portion of goat's meat and all 12 of us sit down to have a bite. The meal lasts less than 2 minutes. The meat is gone and we are packing our stuff. I try to talk to the technician but he looks busy and unwilling. Modibo is standing above us anyway. As I return in the yard I see the students loading the car. Modibo comes out and pays Solo. I try to be discrete and go inside to get my gear. Solo goes to the car and I greet Modibo. I ask if we can talk sometime next week or the week after. He says no problem, they have moved their store a few meters away from the old one but if I ask around I will find it. I wonder if I can have a copy of the recording. Modibo smiles and kindly refuses. He tells me that they are afraid of piracy. Of course. I would like to talk about that too. He likes the idea and we say goodbye. I thank him and say I will ring him soon.*

For the next eight months Modibo and I met and discussed issues around his record label, his business and hunters' music. He released Solo's album and a few more cassettes by other donsonkonifolaw but it was not until February 2011 during that long interview that he explained his behaviour in the studio that day and his production techniques.

I follow Meintjes (2003) who claims that the recording and mixing process is a struggle over signs that embody values, identities and aspirations. The studio, that day, became a space for poetic innovation, social and professional repositioning and empowering moves. Solo, by selecting the songs and engaging in performance, negotiated his power as a master musician. Meanwhile, Modibo exercised his right as a specialist to guide the ensemble through the process of recording. Their identities as hunters seemed to be 'in perfect harmony', working together for their common goal. Yet, they were challenged on the level of production. Solo felt uncomfortable taking Modibo's authoritative suggestions on the spot, but he thought that he had no choice but to comply with the demands of his patron.

Solo and his apprentices as hunters' musicians, embodying *donsoya*, deployed traditional values and beliefs to engage the contemporary world; to reach wider audiences through the promotion and distribution of Modibo's label. Hunters' ethos and practices were put to work in song. *Wasulu donsonkoni* acquires its meaning and efficacy mainly from its associations with the socio-political positioning and social values of hunters' musicians and through the sensorial experience of its audiences.

Hunters' music is subject to manipulation in the interest of musicians and producers. Solo wanted those specific songs on tape and on the market. He praised hunters and *somaw* and had expectations of them. His praise of Cemogo was clearly out of gratitude to him. Cemogo was a father figure and teacher to Solo. A man that took him under his wing and supported him through the years of Solo's apprenticeship with Yoro and later on, after his release as a master musician. It was a way for Solo to express his gratitude and respect. From Mustapha Diallo, he expected a gift. Modibo, on the other hand, insisted that Solo include more names of hunters, to make the album appealing to more people. He also wanted to include as many songs as possible in one cassette, so he decided to shorten the songs in two ways. First, to manipulate the process of recording by telling them to stop after a number of minutes when the song had reached its peak and was becoming repetitive, according to him. Second, by employing the technique of 'fade out', and lowering the volume during the mastering of the recording. Modibo's goal was to make a successful album of Solo. One that people would celebrate.

Solo's songs become a means of generating collective celebration. Hunters' music audiences have grown to include hunters and non-hunters who are aficionados of this music. They celebrate *donsoya* as their cultural heritage and as an antidote to contemporary external threats to their culture, like modernity, globalization, migration, war and terrorism as well as internal ones like unemployment, poverty, drought, shortage of food and conflict especially up in the north of the country. As with the *Bamana*, Jackson (1998: 73) tells how Kuranko's dealings with the outside world are influenced by 'an existential crisis of control' and how they become increasingly confused and oppressed. Elsewhere, Jackson (2002:34) highlights the fact that although for the powerful who control and profit from globalization, the world is getting smaller, the majority experiences it as bigger and alien. Malians are very much aware of these

concepts, not always through written sources and academic discourses,<sup>106</sup> but through experiential processes in their lifeworlds. They witness changes in their world daily: Madu's new home in Kati is part of Amadu Toumani Toure's plan to provide affordable housing to Malians and assigned two Chinese enterprises to construct a number of 'ATTbugu' (Amadu Toumani Toure's village) in various neighbourhoods of Bamako. Soon a Malaysian enterprise joined them. Another Chinese construction company was assigned to design and assist the construction of the new avenue that transverses Bamako from the centre to Sebeninkoro (Solo eventually performed at its opening). The same company was responsible for the biggest road junction in Mali just opposite 'Lybiabugu', a small town within the city of Bamako, funded by President Gadaffi and built by Libyans, to host the administration of the state. Asian traders moved in Bamako. Asian restaurants, supermarkets, hotels and bars were becoming popular among visitors. A growing Chinese community was added to the 6,000 French expatriates. The new community became so big that there was word that there were plans to import 3,000 prostitutes from China. Meanwhile, women and girls from other West African countries were arriving to join this profession. The Lebanese night clubs and restaurants had to compete with new ones from 'the East.' Lack of financial resources drove high school girls to prostitution. Men were gathering outside the schoolyards to pick them up. My consultants were sceptical, Madu's family was worried, all my friends were uncertain about the future days.

People believe that *donsow* are able to predict and manipulate the future through secret knowledge and divination. They thus celebrate hunters' events and radio shows dedicated to *donsoya*. They also celebrate music recordings as a manifestation of *donsoya*. Modibo as a professional, a specialist, knows this very well and does his best to produce albums that people embrace and experience.

Modibo regards the process of recording "an exchange of ideas". Recording is not an easy task especially if the intention is to produce an album that will be cherished by a wider audience and become a commercial success. He welcomes advice from the technicians, suggestions from people who are present in the studio and the musicians themselves. Modibo's democratic spirit is evident in his saying, "If one person decides to do everything, he will ruin everything!"

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<sup>106</sup> These issues have been discussed by many western scholars such as Appadurai (1996, 2001) and Eriksen (2007).

Modibo perceives himself as a guide. Often he will orient the singer during recording. Using the microphone in the control room he will give advice to the musician through his headphones, “stop for a while, play this way, do that.” Sometimes the music may be too fast or the singing too slow and not in sync. It is his job to alert the ensemble through the singer. At other times, he tries to put the musicians on the right track. The aim is to get a perfect sound and good quality work; the best results from the musicians. He intervenes during the process and stated that his experience is his main asset, “the producer must be an experienced person who will lead the recording to perfection.”

Recordings are always done ‘live’. The ensemble plays live, together in the recording room, and Modibo records every instrument and voice at the same time, “on the spot”. A recording session would last for about two hours and the outcome would be enough to fill a sixty-minute cassette. It is not uncommon to record two albums on the same day, back to back. In that case, the session would be four hours long. During the recording process, Modibo employs a technique called *togo fo* or naming in song. It is not uncommon, even in public events for a hunter, an apprentice, or a radio presenter, to approach the bard as he is singing, to inform him that an important individual has arrived on site. It is the bard’s duty to welcome him and praise him as soon as possible. Modibo, in the studio, uses the same tool to remind Solo of names of hunters, *somaw* or powerful non-hunters that should be praised.

Modibo asserts that “The hunters’ music cassettes have no value if heroes/hunters’ names are not mentioned in them”. He goes on to highlight the fact that the *donsonkoni* is played for heroes, extraordinary men who can accomplish anything they choose in life. It is music for the heroes to dance to. Jackson (1998:49) discusses the notion of hero, in relation to the *Kuranko*: ‘A hero must risk his life in the wilderness in order to gain the powerful things on which community life depends.’ The texts of this music genre are about these individuals and their deeds. The *nkonifola* has to mention them in his songs. As a producer, Modibo feels obliged to remind the singer of heroes’ names. He feels that unless mentioned in song, they will be forgotten and the people will never know they ever existed. In the past, if warriors were getting ready for war, the hunters’ harp was played for them to motivate and give them courage. The harp was also played during their return from battle, to welcome them back, to salute them and to praise the heroes’ prowess. So, names of heroes should be mentioned in songs. Heroes

should be mentioned in cassettes to make the music bewitching. “Without praising heroes, hunters’ music will be tasteless!” declared Modibo.

## **ANALOGUE VS DIGITAL FORMATS**

During the 1980s, cassettes were introduced in Mali. They soon became very popular because of their durability and resistance to weather conditions but also to how they were treated by users. In comparison to pricy vinyl LPs, which were very sensitive to the heat and dust of the Sahelian landscape, cassettes were inexpensive, served multiple purposes<sup>107</sup> and could last longer, up to ninety minutes, played on portable radio-cassette players that were also cheaper and more resilient to the climate and could be operated on batteries.

Producers embraced the new medium and abandoned the vinyl LP. Hunters’ music was never released on vinyl format in Mali. Instead, when Siriman started his business, he decided to give the new medium a chance. The cassette format has dominated the hunters’ music industry. It is still the format most preferred by producers and clients but there are signs of change. According to Modibo, many people prefer to watch hunters’ events than simply listen to them. Until 2004, the DVD was not common in Mali. Images were recorded on VHS cassette and VCD but they were not very popular because of formatting prices and technologies. No hunters’ events were ever released on these formats in Mali.<sup>108</sup>

In 2011, it was easy to find DVDs at low cost everywhere. DVD players had become affordable and people could also watch them on computers. There was an increasing demand for hunters’ ceremonies and public events in this medium. People like to watch the magical demonstrations of hunters and their traditional tunics. Hunters’ tunics are breathtaking and beautiful, and have become a symbol of hunters’ prowess and ethos to the minds of contemporary Malians. Many old and experienced hunters, sorcerers and famous diviners even administrators and successful businessmen attend such ceremonies, a fact that makes them even more popular. Malians want to watch such personalities and celebrities. They, in fact, prefer watching ceremonies to video clips of hunters’ music. Modibo was not interested in filming video clips of his

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<sup>107</sup> For example, listening but also recording audio: music, events, speeches, interviews and so forth.

<sup>108</sup> Some video cassettes were produced in France particularly by Camara Productions. I know of a number of Sekouba Traore performances that were released. They involved concerts and private events in Paris.



artists but he was a big supporter of films. He was trying to introduce DVDs and CDs gradually to the market, but not without difficulties.

New technological developments affect the hunters' music industry. Modibo wanted to proceed in that direction very carefully. His ambition was to release all albums in both formats. Many of his clients had new cars equipped with CD players instead of the cassette players and they asked him to release CDs. His aim was to lower the price of the CDs to the level of cassettes. He believed that this way they would sell. Unfortunately, he did not yet have the means to do it. He had done some filming and had released a couple of DVDs with hunters' ceremonies but he claimed that these sell only in Bamako. In the countryside where electricity is not available, devices have to be operated on batteries. DVD players do not respond very well and drain the batteries quickly.

Modibo is also a merchant and preferred CD format to cassette. The sound of the CD may be superior but it has to be treated with care. CDs can be scratched easily and damaged. Clients complained that CDs may last for three months or so, then they had to be replaced. That implies more profit for his business. He always thought that this was the intention of the CD industry. However, CD prices have decreased since its invention and they are now very affordable. By contrast, cassettes are becoming more and more expensive. The magnetic tape manufactured in Europe has become scarce and expensive as it has to be imported. Therefore, the future of the cassette in Mali looks uncertain but at present it is still the most popular medium in Malian music industry.



Fig. 24: Cassette releases of donsonkoni and simbi by Siriman Diallo Productions.

At the time of this research, hunters' music industry was still based on analogue tape cassettes. Some of the old classics may be re-released on compact disc. Only a few of the new releases were done in both formats and even fewer were the official DVDs that circulate. I would say that only an optimistic 5% is released on CD format and less than 1% on DVD. According to Solo, all CDs and VHS (analogue video cassettes) are pirated copies of original cassettes or field recordings and films. Mama Konakeou released Solo's third album, *Ŋanaw* in both CD and cassette format. Cassettes cost 1,000 FCFA and CDs 2,000 FCFA. These are local prices for Malians. Tourists tend to pay five to six times this price. The DVDs are more expensive (up to 3,500 FCFA) and producers in general tend to be sceptical about producing them for fear of poor sales. Films in DVD copies can be obtained from the numerous professional who own photo studios and film events such as weddings and parties including hunters' public events. They may charge whatever they think appropriate though. Donsonkonifolaw want to have records of their performances. It is not uncommon to ask filmmakers to film their performances, but they have to pay the expenses themselves.

### **'PUBLICITE!'**

We need the use of the media! (Modibo Diallo 2011)

Publicity is carried out by the producer and can be done in different ways taking advantage of the media available. Mama Konakeou prefers to do most of his publicity on television whilst Modibo Diallo uses radio stations. All private and public radio stations in Bamako have hunters' music shows. Modibo distributes samples of his new releases to the radio presenters, in advance, so they can play them during their programmes. The presenter advertises the new album and gives the details of when and where it can be found and purchased.

New albums are advertised on the National television channel with the date of their release. They will also be played in every radio show on hunters' music and in some cases interviews will be conducted. For Modibo, the advantage of publicity is that people learn about the artist and, if the cassette is on the market, should be easy to find.

Radio presenters promote hunters' music on radio and television. Prior to the release of a cassette, Siriman used to go to Radio Mali and pay 100,000 FCFA for an announcement and advertisement of the cassette. The next day people arrive at his store in downtown Bamako to request the cassette and inquire about the artist. At the beginning, he used to give presenters cassettes for free but, nowadays, because of the plethora of radio stations and of hunters' shows, it is very costly to do that. He distributes all new releases to presenters for free so they can play them, but they have to buy older ones they might want. He provides free samples to four or five radio stations which host hunters' music shows on different days of the week. It is in the best interest of the producer to advertise his new product and to keep the interest of the public in regards to his artists. However it seems that producers and musicians agree with what Solo stated: "The number of copies a producer can sell depends on the musician's talent". Hunters who really like genuine donsonkoni will buy the cassette because of the originality of the songs and will recommend it to others. Ordinary people will buy the cassette out of admiration for the musician and his beautiful voice. They also care about the message in the songs.



Fig. 25: (L-R) Solomane Konate, Modibo Diallo and Sekou Camara in Modibo's record shop in downtown Bamako (February 2011).

As many as 3,000 copies can be sold but the first edition is usually for 1.000 copies and the producer orders more as the sales progress. I have seen many second and third editions since 2003. In general, pop music (Malian or African) cassettes sell fast

and in great quantities while donsonkoni cassettes sell slowly, but steadily. Over the years they have proven a reliable constant and undeniable investment. Pop stars usually sell well in the first few months of their releases but then sales slow down dramatically. The contrary happens with donsonkonifolaw. The more well-known a cassette becomes, the more it sells and the more famous the musician becomes (if he is a young one) the more sales and gigs he signs for. Unfortunately, popularity and fame attract music piracy.

## **THE THORN OF MUSIC PIRACY**

Music piracy is ‘the unauthorised commercial reproduction of musical works’ (Skinner 2012: 723). The consumption of pirated media is a frequent phenomenon in Malian society that, paradoxically, has a negative attitude towards it. Music producers and recording artists engage in heated polemics about it. As a consequence, Skinner puts it, ‘Artists experience a crisis of professional status and identity’ that have more to do with their position as political subjects than with lost revenues or infringed copyrights (ibid).

In March 2005, the two Bamako based record companies that operate Mali’s two “legal” cassette duplication factories, Mali K7 and Seydoni-Mali and especially their General Managers, Phillippe Berthier and Fousseyni Traore respectively, along with a number of Malian artists decided to express their contempt for music piracy in Mali by closing the factories and organising the Dabanani ‘descente au marche’. Escorted by the police in one of the two tours in the Big Market or *suguba*, in downtown Bamako, they confiscated a number of pirate copies of cassettes from local vendors, and later destroyed them in front of the Ministry of Culture (ibid: 733-735). A second gathering of artists was organised the following month in the Centre Culturel Francais (the site for cultural initiative funded by the French state) and a protest march and civilian shakedown at retail venues were held ‘to force the government to assume its responsibilities’ (Bolly 2005, cited in Skinner 2012: 735). This act resulted in a police sprawl in Dabani, in June 2005. During the five-hour operation, dozens of boutiques were searched by 200 police officers. Skinner (ibid;) states that, “Over 200,000 cassettes, CDs, and VCDs were confiscated (Lavaine 2005), representing more than half the total number of counterfeit music products collected by Malian authorities between 2002 and 2007, according to statistics at the BuMDA (Koné 2007).” Shortly after, Mali K7 and Seydoni-Mali re-opened.

Skinner (2012: 739) also provides some dated but useful statistics about the situation in the music industry. ‘Djibril Kane, the Directeur des Exploitations at Seydoni-Mali, provides the following figures on the economic impact of music piracy in contemporary Mali (Kane 2005): Of the approximately 10,000,000 cassettes purchased in Mali in 2004, 91.5 percent were said to be ‘pirated.’ This figure is based on an estimate of cassettes duplicated without “mechanical rights” (droits mécaniques), or the right granted by the copyright owner to mechanically reproduce an artistic work.’

Piracy in Mali is an under-researched but nevertheless interesting area that begs further investigation. Two kinds of music piracy exist in Mali. The first involves proper pirate copies of original cassettes that have been manufactured abroad and then imported to the country. They bear exactly the same cover as the original but the BuMDA watermark sticker is included. The original cover bearing the sticker is used as a prototype for the printing of the pirate cover. The sticker does not glitter and is of a different colour from the original, mostly a pale shade of green as opposed to bright silver.

The second type of piracy comes in a much more local character and involves what people call *cassette locale*. *Cassettes locales* are private copies of original cassettes on blank tapes of different brands. These copies are sold for a lower price than the original, 750 FCFA versus 1,000 FCFA to people in the market. They are sold by *wotoronintigiw*, wheelbarrow owners, who duplicate them in portable sound systems and who carry them around to ‘broadcast’ and sell on two-wheel barrows. The sound systems resemble the 1980s ghetto blasters.

Wheelbarrow owners will buy just one original cassette and use it to make dozens of copies. They justify their means by claiming that the original cassette is ‘out of stock’ and also that they offer ‘a chance to get a lower price’. Most of them are ignorant of the fact that they cause losses to the music industry. Solo used to tell a story about a *wotoronintigi* in Djikoroni, who once tried to sell a copy of Solo’s first release to Solo, for 1,000 FCFA. He even claimed that he knew Solo, his family and their house. Solo then revealed who he was and made the man give the three boxes (some 30 copies) of *cassettes locales* of his album plus the 15,000 FCFA the *wotoronintigi* has made from sales of Solo’s pirate copies. The man learned his lesson, Solo claimed. Solo and he are friends now. I met him at the very spot that the event took place. He was still selling *cassettes locales*.

When I asked Solo why he did not play songs from his album *Ŋanaw*, he told me that he could not play them live because of his contract with Mama. Many people are recording his performances and some might make pirate copies which would cause a drop in sales of the original cassette. He also said that new songs should be kept secret and not performed in public, until they are released as cassettes, otherwise other musicians can pick them up and record them, claiming 'ownership'. When he agreed to record some of his new and unreleased songs for Issa's Radio Show, he did so, because he could claim 'ownership' of those songs since it was a proper recording session for a radio station.

Piracy has forced many producers to quit their trade while making everyone in the music industry poorer. Individuals involved in piracy, reproduce original cassettes in Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia or even in Asia. Any album that 'hits the charts' is immediately pirated. From 2000 on, piracy inflicted the hunters' music industry. Modibo believes that producers are forced to share the market with the pirates. If an album is destined to sell 1,000 copies, then maybe half of these will be sold by the producer and the remaining half by pirates. The producer who did all the work receives much less than he deserves.

Modibo expressed bitterness about this. Clients care about the music and are happy to pay less for it. They do not care about the welfare of the musician, the producer or the distributor. The clients of pirates see nothing but cheap goods. Pirates also copy CDs onto their computers and sell them for half the price of the original CD. They also use their mobile phones to capture sound and/or video, which they will then download and edit on computer. They keep many music files in hard drives and are able to provide quick and affordable copies to clients. With the spread of computer technologies and the fall of prices globally, clients now can bring their own memory card, flash drive or USB key to the copier who will fill it with songs. An average price per song is 50 FCFA but it is negotiable and can drop further the more songs one is buying. Modibo believed that the public unintentionally encourage piracy by buying its products. People were regarded as being ignorant on matters of copyright and production expenses.

Modibo considered another form of piracy practised by tubabuw (white people). He claimed that many Europeans and Americans come to Mali to film and record ceremonies and cultural events in order to produce CDs and DVDs. They release their



products in the United States and Europe without paying copyrights to the artists. This a very interesting and important issue but unfortunately, here, I do not have the space to elaborate.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Mande hunters' music industry is very locally oriented. No producer exports cassettes to Europe or the United States or the Middle East and Asia. It is a labour of love but at least, a profitable one. Producers come and go depending on the difficulties of the trade, mainly a lack of capital and piracy. The ones who remain active, negotiate with musicians, form professional relationships, sign contracts and interact through discourse to produce albums in different formats like cassettes, CDs and DVDs in the buzzing markets of all areas in Bamako but also in distant areas of Mali as well. The organisation of Mali K7 acts as distributor in most cases, with private initiatives to follow. Battered by piracy, expert producers like Siriman and Modibo Diallo uphold their position in the hunters' music industry. They use different techniques for recording and preserving hunters' cultural heritage. Proud and determined, they continue to struggle through difficulties and invite musicians to record their repertoires in the studio. They also welcome younger musicians who want to become famous. They are involved in hunters' events, some as initiated hunters and others as mere aficionados whose aim is to document and expand the popularity of this old musical tradition. With years of experience in manipulating old and new recording technologies, they manipulate the studio equipment to produce their unique signature sound and then promote their artists' new albums through the media, the topic of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Donso ka Kεnε: HUNTER'S DOMAIN ON RADIO WAVES

In this chapter I discuss the transmission and dissemination of hunters' music through the mass media, what the Bamana call *kunafolidilaw*. I provide a brief history of the media, especially radio, in Mali and move on to examine the role of the media technologies and radio producers in the spread of hunters' music in Mali, especially Bamako. Modern media 'reterritorialise' cultural traditions and diversity around states, undermining the two main political alternatives to the state: 'tribes' and empires (Postill 2006: 17). In modern independent Mali, mass media like television and radio function as Postill describes, however, hunters' radio and television shows do so through specific ways: by promoting hunters' values and ethos, through sound and musical performance, they offer an alternative to a nation-state that is going through a process of change in the new global reality. In this framework, hunters' cultural capital becomes a space where contemporary Malians meet to form social networks. Let us see how media helps in this respect by mediating sound.

#### **MEDIATING SOUND**

Jo Tacchi (2002) in discussing radio texture focuses on the everyday use of sound and how sound acts to 'create an environment for domestic living' (ibid:241). Radio sound is a presence in domestic time and space but it can also provide a frame for social interactions, in Goffman's sense, or lack of them. Tacchi's premise is that radio sound creates a textured soundscape at home where people can move around and live their lives. These sounds on a social and personal level connect with other places and times, are linked with memories and feelings, either experienced or imagined, and can evoke different states of mind and moods. Radio as a medium is intimate, immediate and direct. Its sound is experienced as a part of the material culture of the home contributing significantly to the formation of domestic environments.

I propose that radio stations in Mali and specifically their shows dedicated to *donsoya* and hunters' music, create such a framework for social interactions between



hunters and non-hunters audiences. Furthermore, Tacchi's sense of a textured soundscape at home proves to be useful in my discussion of hunters' music and reception from the Malian public sphere. According to my consultants, contemporary Malians connect on a social and personal level with the sounds of *donsoya*. They do so in everyday life; they embrace and embody the sound of the harp and the *karipan*; the voice of the singer and hunters' poetics. Hunters' lore and stories connect them with other places and other times like the glorious era of the Mali Empire and its associations with *donsoya*: the old values, righteousness, valour and moral code; in essence, what is in danger or lacking in modern postcolonial Mali. This is not alien to them. Some of them learned about it in school, other have heard it in stories from their fathers and griots in different occasions. Yet, it is the familiar that becomes desirable; rather, it is the absence of familiar that makes 'the absent familiar,' necessary. Malians identify with heroes of the past and present; of great hunters; their deeds and struggle against nature, beasts, spirits, destiny and the-things-to-come.

Radio sound can be used to fill space and time; it can refresh memories and feelings or other places and other times; it can ground someone in the present; and it can help establish and maintain identities. As a time-based medium it is used as a marker of time (ibid: 242). As Tacchi explains, radio can be used to create a social self. Listening to it becomes a social activity. The sound can reinforce sociality and sense of social self but also fill the gaps in one's social life. It is this way that contemporary Malians connect with hunters and their music. They feel excitement; they gain emotional strength and courage from the songs to overcome obstacles and live their lives; they feel motivated and participate in public hunters' events and ceremonies. Tacchi also notes two ethnomusicological studies that are relevant to the notion of sound as texture: Chris Waterman's (1990) ethnography of *juju* music among the Yoruba in Nigeria and Steven Feld's (1990) *Sound and Sentiment* among the Kaluli of Bosavi, Papua New Guinea are both relevant to my discussion of hunters' music.

Waterman (1990: 8) suggests that musical style can express and define communal values in a rapidly transforming, heterogeneous society. *Juju* as a popular musical style can proclaim 'cultural consolidation'. Tacchi (2002: 249) parallels this to the 'classic gold radio stations' who play music from the 1950s to 1980s. One of his informants, aged only 29, looks to this music and era as a 'lovely time' although it is an imagined past. He is thus creating a particular soundscape that evokes an idealised past.

Tacchi notes that ‘such stations perhaps offer the opportunity for nostalgia and a syncretism of past and present, analogous to Waterman’s exploration of the syncretism of tradition and change in modern Nigerian musical style’ (ibid: 248). The ‘densely textured soundscape’ of *juju* ‘conditions the behaviour of participants in Yoruba neo-traditional life-cycle celebrations’ (Waterman 1990: 214). Waterman investigates music in its context but also as a context ‘for human perception and action’ (ibid). I argue that *donsonkoni* is an old musical tradition that has become more and more popular because it expresses and defines hunters values, that are desirable to the wider community. In Tacchi’s sense this might be interpreted as ‘retro’ music from another, imagined, time (a “lovely time”); an idealised, distant and nostalgic past.

Feld noticed that the Kaluli used sound as an expressive means to communicate shared feelings and emotions and link activities, myths, feelings, gender and expressive performance (Feld 1990: 14). Both Waterman and Feld perceive the soundscape as interacting and overlapping sounds: ‘all sounds are dense, multilayered, overlapping, alternating and interlocking’ (ibid: 265). A *donsonkoni* performance has similar properties, as we have seen in the previous chapters. The sound of the harp, the scraping metal sound of the *nege*, the buzzing of the rattle, the rhythmic beat of the *kutsuba*, the airy whistle of the *sufle*, the voice of the *nkonifola*, the response of the chorus, the clapping of the crowd, the screaming of the women, the blast of the muskets, overlap, creating a dense, interlocking and social soundscape; vibrant and inviting; tempting and welcoming. Radio, I suggest following Tacchi (2002: 255), stimulates the imagination which in turn gives substance and meaning to sound, and sound gives meaning to relations between self and others.

## **THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA**

Thanks to radio stations almost everybody likes hunters’ music in modern Mali. People listen to it more than any other music today. Women who used to fear this music, listen to it nowadays. Old and young people alike enjoy listening to it. Despite the changes in style, old people still listen to it. Anywhere there is a radio station in Mali there is a hunters’ music program. Every radio station, private or public in every city, town or village in Mali has a hunters’ music show. Radio stations made this music very popular (Issa Toure).

Issa is a young, educated man who earns a living as an engineer, supervising construction sites. He also hosts a hunters' radio program at the Moribambougou community radio station, a few kilometers outside Bamako. A true aficionado of donsonkoni and a hunters' admirer, he became friends with Solo through music. At the time of this research he was still an uninitiated hunter but was planning to become one with Solo as his karamɔgɔ. My discussions with Issa were numerous and our interactions always productive. As a dedicated fan of Solo, he loved and visited Solo's family very often during the week, and assisted Solo in many cases. He strongly believes that Solo deserves to be internationally known as an excellent nkonifola. Issa has worked toward this goal by every means: he played his songs regularly on the radio; he did not miss a single gig of Solo in Bamako and even travelled to the countryside whenever this was possible, to record Solo's performances and transmitted them through his show; he attended hunters' meetings and events whenever possible to assist Solo and support him with his presence; he advocated him in all times; he assisted during his 'release' from his former producer and contributed to his new contract with Modibo Diallo; he was present during Solo's studio recordings; and was beside him in illness and joy. Issa's insights shape this chapter and my understanding of the role of the media in the hunters' music scene in Bamako. Another important figure that contributed immensely to this chapter is Ibrahim DaMonzon Diarra.

National radio and television presenter, DaMonzon, or Da as I call him, was the man who insisted that I become an apprentice of Solo and study with him the hunters' harp. He was the man who took me to many concerts and hunters' events; negotiated my apprenticeship and initiation; invited me numerous times to the ORTM studios to experience a hunters' radio show; made copies of endless field recordings kept at the archives of national radio, and copies of documentaries and footage regarding hunters' performances from the national television; and the man who kept checking on me for my wellbeing and progress of my education in the field. DaMonzon, conceptually, is in the middle of what Idhe (1990: 2) calls human-technology interaction; television's role to let in the world; radio's role to entertain or inform. DaMonzon does exactly that, he uses the media to bring the world into family homes, to entertain and inform them about hunters' lore and music.



Fig. 26: DaMonzon Diarra in the studio of ORTM during the broadcast of his hunters' music show, *Donso ka Kεε* (August 2007).

Radio stations have played an important role in the expansion and popularity of hunters' lore. The phenomenon started with the advent of private radio stations. The radio presenters attend hunters' performances and record the music with their 'dictaphones' (analogue tape recorders or digital voice recorders). These recordings are brought to the radio station studios where they are used in the hunters' music shows. The persistence of radio presenters in playing hunters' music eventually led to people getting to know this genre and develop an affection for it. The reason for this was that these presenters provided the context for such performances and promoted hunters' role in society. They clarified to their audiences that hunters should not be feared but respected as the prime holders of old traditions and pillars of society and underlined the importance of this musical genre as a valuable asset of modern Mali. According to them, the sound of the harp and the other instruments make it so exciting and distinct from other musical genres that are popular in the country. Furthermore it is music based on stories related to hunters' prowess and moral code.

Most of the music played on the radio shows is *folikeyoɾo kaseti*, 'field recordings'. Industrial-made cassettes of studio recordings are part of the music heard in these two-hour programs. Ordinary people who are not *donsow* or *somaw* enjoy hunters' music and favor certain *donsokonifolaw*. These 'fans' or enthusiasts, when their favorite artist releases a cassette, will rush to the market to acquire it. Numerous times during my visits to Modibo's family shop in central Bamako, I would see hunters

and non-hunters gathering around the shop and its boom box to listen to latest releases or older ones. They share listening time with other people and, thus, the new cassette will be enjoyed by more than one person. Listeners, through shared experience, get excited about the stories and praise songs of the hunters as Issa mentioned. The song texts make them proud, give them courage to overcome the difficulties of life and urge them to do 'great things'. The audiences of these shows are in constant communication with the presenters. People will ring to ask for a particular song or their favorite artist and express their pleasure for the show. "They congratulate us a lot for this," Issa states, "they listen to us a lot!"

As Askew (2003: 17) points out, special requests followed by a 'dedication' may be perceived as public acts because of the wide audience of the show, but they retain 'a strong element of anonymity' since there is no physical contact between the requester, the announcer, the audience and the musicians represented by the recording. In the context of hunters' radio shows, I argue that this is irrelevant. Solo always listened to every weekly radio show; in that sense, he was always present as many other musicians whom I met. All hunters were able to tell me what, who and when had been played in each programme, claiming their own presence. Dedications would be returned instantly or if time was short, the following week. The presenters knew their audience members and if not, they were to meet them soon. Listeners connected to each other through the radio shows. Newcomers would find out the presenter's phone number, call and introduce himself and request a song by a specific artist or a meeting with the presenter. Listeners would be told about events, in and around Bamako, and choose to attend the most suitable ones for their convenience. A community of listeners, presenters and musicians already existed before I arrived in Mali in 2007. The members of this network were regularly in contact with each other and openly identified themselves in every radio show by name. This was exactly the way I got in touch with DaMonzon. It was during one of his shows that Madu and I rang him to investigate the option of attending one of his future shows. Da was able to shed light on the history of these programmes, a topic to which I turn now.

## **HISTORY OF HUNTERS' MUSIC PROGRAMMES**

The very first person who played hunters' music on a dedicated show about hunters, was Magma Gabriel Konate. The year was 1989. A radio presenter at the private radio

station Bamakan, Magma became the role model for all radio presenters who followed him. Bamakan was the first private radio station to emerge from the post-dictatorship era of General Moussa Traore. During the regime of General Traore no private radio stations were allowed to operate in the country. The only radio was the national Radio Mali in Bamako that used to record and transmit hunters' music, especially that of Toumani Kone, but it was not until the arrival of private radio stations that hunters' music radio shows appeared in Mali. There was a boom in private radio stations following 1989 and many started to house programmes of hunters' music. Magma was the one to motivate and inspire other presenters to get involved with this musical tradition and to organize their shows around it. DaMonzon considers him as his *karam ɔɔɔ*, mentor and teacher.

When Magma first started his show at Bamakan, it was not received well by the general public. The idea at the time was that hunters are not part of the Islamized Mali, that they still hold to old customs, beliefs and indigenous religions, such as the ancestors, bush and animal spirits, power objects and fetishes, blood sacrifices and sorcery. People accused Magma, a Muslim, of animating a programme dealing with 'pagans and animists'. Magma resisted and endured insults, and continued his show for many years.

The donsonkoni boom is usually associated with the private radio stations boom but while there was music production activity by Siriman Diallo during the 1990s, donsonkoni started to gain popularity in 2000 which continues today. As soon as a presenter of a new private radio station broadcasts donsoya, people tune in and the radio station becomes known and loved. All radio stations organize hunters' shows that attract audiences. In a sense, these radio shows advertise the radio station. The first private radio station to open was Bamakan followed by Radio Tabale and then Radio Kayira.

Private radio stations began to proliferate between 2002 and 2005. Great emphasis was put on hunters' lore and music by private radio stations when Pascal Baba Coulibaly organized the first festival of the hunters in 2001. People, I was told, were infatuated with hunters' ceremonies and performances prior to that; however, after the festival, even women and children became interested in donsoya. The festival exemplified the hunters' importance to the nation, promoted their behavioral code and worldview based on ancient and traditional values and norms, and restored the hunters'

image as religious, noble and reliable individuals with extraordinary powers that can help the community and their families. Children were fascinated by the stories and women saw hunters as potential spouses.

### **Folikeyoro Kaseti : CONCERT CASSETTES**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, producers and radio presenters make field recordings that are called folikeyoro kaseti (literally music-playing-site) or konserti kaseti (concert cassettes). Radio presenters are usually invited to attend events and ceremonies where they can set up their gear and record hunters' music performances.<sup>109</sup>



Fig. 27: Solomane Konate accompanied by his apprentice Kalifa who is holding the microphone and two radio presenters with tape recorders documenting the performance (February 2010).

It is not unusual for music producers to ask presenters to listen to these recordings. In case they are pleased with the quality of sound and song content (singing, praises and stories) they may ask permission from the presenters to mass produce these recordings on their record labels. Therefore such recordings can be used in broadcasting but also in the music industry as master tapes for album releases. In both cases, field recordings are

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<sup>109</sup> Some radio presenters would crash hunters' public events, a practice that was acceptable. Others would be invited by the host of the event or the musicians that feature in it. DaMonzon differentiated himself from all other presenters by stating that he travelled around Mali by invitation only to attend such events and make recordings.

directed towards an audience that, according to Issa, is inclined more towards such recording than studio albums. Issa explains:

Field recordings are more important than studio recorded cassettes; studio albums are limited because they are forty minutes long and the songs are most likely to be around three to five minutes long. They have four songs on each side or one twenty-minute song dedicated to one individual. With field recordings the sky is the limit. A song can be an hour long; the singer can speak all his mind; he sings heroic songs which he dedicates to extraordinary and famous people. In the studio, the *nkonifola* is not at ease; he is not free to act as he likes; he cannot say everything he intends to because of the time limit. But in field recordings [in performance] he is free to say whatever people want to hear from him, to speak longer about the person who is praising; for this reason people love field recordings more than studio albums; many people prefer to attend performances where they directly listen to the songs than listen to cassettes (Issa Toure 2011).

Issa makes a very important point here. Apart from explaining the time limitations of a cassette, he criticizes the practices of music producers who deliberately instruct their artists to finish a song in three to five minutes (a practice familiar to Modibo Diallo; see previous chapter). He then acts as an advocate of musicians who, in performance, feel free to elaborate on their praise-singing in a way that is much more satisfactory and appealing to the audience. Issa also claims authority as a field recorder. It is mainly radio presenters who record in the field leaving the studio to the hands of music producers.

## **THE ROLE OF RADIO PRESENTERS**

Without us *donsonkoni* would remain unknown! (DaMonzon Diarra 2011)

DaMonzon sees himself as a facilitator of hunters' music. He plays the sample cassettes that producers give him as part of their promotional strategies so the audience is kept informed at all times for the new cassette releases. He will play one or more songs of the new cassette and announce the name of the producer and the location of his shop so



the interested parties of the audience know where to get it. He believes that a cassette release sells well because a radio presenter plays it and people listen to it. Radio presenters therefore help *nkonifolaw* to become known and contribute to the success of an album. “Nowadays, it is not enough to be a skillful and competent or even excellent musician; it is not enough to release cassettes; the industry needs the media to keep the tradition popular and to increase industry’s profit”, Da proclaimed.

Radio presenters, just like music producers, are not obliged to enter the brotherhood of the hunters to host their hunters’ radio shows, but only the initiated ones will be able to attend hunters-exclusive ceremonies such as the ones held at the *dankun*. DaMonzon and Issa, for example, are not initiated hunters but others are, such as Kayiraba Toure at Radio Tabale and Bamana Seydou at Radio Jekafo (both members of the Federation National des Chasseur du Mali), Solomane Dembele at Radio Liberte and Le Beau Magma Gabriel at Radio Bamakan (both members of ANACMA). While DaMonzon has chosen not to become a hunter, Issa is planning to be initiated. He expresses a real admiration and respect for the *donsoton*, “You should not enter the association merely because you are aiming for something in it; you must love the work you are doing!” The presenters’ job is to attend hunters’ ceremonies and events, to record performances and then broadcast and report what they have seen and heard on radio.

Every Sunday, Issa ‘Dougoufana’ Toure rides his scooter to Moribabougou where he hosts the hunters’ radio show at Moribabougou FM from 15:30 to 17:30. He attends as many performances as he can during the week and especially the weekends, recording and socializing with hunters and musicians alike. He is interested in discovering new *donsonkonifolaw* as well as fostering already established ones like his friend Solomane Konate. The two of them along with another broadcaster, Enciene ‘Kritien Soma’ Traore at Radio Donko, are very close and often get together to discuss life in general and music in particular. Issa and Enciene make choices when they select which *nkoni* player’s music they wish to play on their shows. There are certain criteria to follow: first, the *nkonifola* has to be “loved by everybody” and second he should not “say any nonsense in his cassettes.” Inquiries are made among the elderly and the youth but also among other musicians.

Issa and Enciene listen back to their field recordings to find suitable sections for broadcasting. They look for sections that are easy for people to understand

linguistically; and sections where people can get inspired and encouraged to take on obstacles of life. It is through this process that people are exposed to hunters' music. Presenters, besides being the strongest advocates and promoters of hunters' music, are also the ones that guide the audiences through the sounds and the song text; they are the ones who reveal by selection, the passages that will be useful to the audience, especially the ordinary people not familiar with *donsoya*.

When someone adheres to *donsoya* he must do his best to follow the teachings of his *karamogow*. He must try to learn and act accordingly. The same goes for the apprentices of *somaya*. Radio is much like that. A broadcaster of hunters' music must try to find the right words for his speeches that will not be offensive to the nation, to himself, to the community. He must do his best to learn the art of speaking, to convince without offending anyone (Issa Toure 2011).

To have an appeal to the Malian public sphere, radio presenters employ the tactics of *donsokonifolaw*. They have to be competent in speech, *kuma*. As Issa asserts above, a broadcaster is much like a hunters' bard. He uses words to make his point, to invite people to a celebration of *donsoya* that these radio shows are promoting. He offers another layer to the 'textured soundscape' (Tacchi 2002). Some of these recordings that radio presenters make, reach the hands of music producers who release them as cassettes in the market. Thus, they interact with each other. They dramatically differ from each other because where broadcasters offer field recordings of whole performances, music producers confine their artists within the timeframe of a medium, the cassette. However, they complement each other by re-presenting these two aspects of the artists in a radio show.

Artists usually invite as many radio presenters they know to their performances and expect them to record and transmit sections of the concert later in their shows. The relationship between presenters and musicians can vary from mere acquaintance to business associate to close friendship. The stronger the bond between them, the better for the artist. Some presenters tend to have strong preferences towards specific artists and play their music week after week ignoring other musicians. Others tend to be more neutral or objective and include as many musicians as they can in their shows so that they will be heard at least every three weeks. Because of the strong competition

between artists, some are inclined to use their relationship with radio presenters to “sabotage” their colleagues. They might talk to their favorite presenters and persuade them not to give airplay to certain musicians and not play their cassettes. I came across such a case when Enciene and Issa confided in me that certain colleagues of theirs would not play any of Solo’s albums, and asked for my advice. We discussed this a number of times and they wanted to find a way to approach their specific colleagues and make them understand that Solo is an important and skilful enough musician to be included in their shows. I was told that these presenters would not even show up at Solo’s performances, although they were invited by Issa and Enciene. The matter remained unsolved when I left Mali in the spring of 2011.

Radio presenters play another important role in an artist’s career. They are most likely the ones to record the first demo of the artist, the *maquette*. The artist gets in touch with the radio presenter to discuss how to proceed. They have a couple of options: either they convene at the artist’s place where the recording is made by the presenter’s portable gear or they can meet at the radio station’s studio where they can use the equipment there to make the recording or again use the portable tape recorder of the broadcaster. As Issa explained, the aim is to have a noise free and clear recording of the songs. To achieve that, Issa prefers to record in isolated rooms away from crowds and ambient sounds from the road, the wind, etc. He also likes to make recordings out in the open in remote locations mainly in the bush where no people can spoil the recording.

The presenter is the one responsible for the sound production of the demo. Acting like a professional music producer, he will give guidance and direction to the artist concerning his songs. He will suggest what to include or exclude, or when to change or substitute parts of the song text. It is mostly the song text that is being criticized in a productive way, so together they can ‘improve’ the song. The goal is to make it accessible to the audience and acceptable to the music producer who will have the final say in the music studio recording as described in the previous chapter. Issa and Enciene are such close friends with Solo that they feel they can be ruthlessly critical of Solo’s singing techniques and the sound of his harp. They are also free to criticize the ensemble and its progress. They will comment on the apprentices’ abilities and achievements and remark upon strengths and weaknesses in performance.

They also act as facilitators between musicians and producers. On numerous occasions I was told that a particular presenter intervened so that a musician would sign

a contract with a music producer. Issa, for example, helped Solo through the cancellation of his contract with Mama Konakeou and assisted Solo to sign a new contract with Modibo Diallo. I was present in both procedures. Issa had recorded Solo and the ensemble in Solo's house. We kept listening to the recording repeatedly and we all made comments on our area of expertise (I was doing my best to find out their preferences on the sound of the ensemble and the balance between the instruments). Issa gave some very welcome suggestions on hunters and *togo fo*. The demo was lying around the house for a number of days. Whenever I went there, I found Solo listening to it and reflecting. Issa visited many times bringing feedback from other people who listened to a copy of the demo that he had made for these purposes. The social network of *donsonkoni* connoisseurs had been working, bringing these different ideas together and acting as an editor in a journal. After the final discussion and recording of the songs, the *maquette* was ready to be taken to Modibo's shop. After listening to it carefully and in peace, he approached Solo with a contract a few days later.

## **THE ROLE OF TELEVISION**

Television, according to my consultants, plays a lesser role in the transmission, dissemination and popularity of hunters' music in Mali. Publicity in television is different from that of radio. Here the main programme that covers the different cultures and musics of the peoples of Mali is 'Terroir,' presented by DaMonzon. While other musical traditions are enjoying wide coverage, *donsonkoni* and hunters' events have a particularity that make presenters uncomfortable in covering them. The reason is the heavy and intense praise singing of the *nkonifolaw* directed at certain individuals, especially *somaw*. As DaMonzon explained, the producers of the show feel reluctant to show these dances in case of misinterpretation by the television audience. The rationale is as follows: hunters and healers are important figures and this is why *nkonifolaw* praise their names and deeds; those praised stand up to join the musicians in a dance but they also stand out from the crowd as special individuals; the producers believe that by showing them on screen, they advertise and promote these individuals over others and that the spectators of the show will be critical of such choice. It is not uncommon for people to make comments like: "Look at this! Here is Mr.X, he must be a very famous *soma*! Can't you see that television workers are doing publicity on him?" (DaMonzon Diarra)

What DaMonzon said applies to the urban areas, where *somaya* is very popular and widespread. It is also true that cameramen tend to film celebrities and VIPs more than ordinary people. So, presenters like DaMonzon need to be very careful and selective when it comes to editing the footage for the show. It is also true that in rural areas and during hunters' events, *somaw* might not be present and filming may not be as problematic in that respect. I have seen much footage from hunters events filmed by ORTM that spans from the 1980s to the present and what DaMonzon points out is immediately noticed. *Somaw* are very powerful and dangerous individuals and should be treated with caution. It is difficult to refuse a request from a *soma* and presenters do not want to have to advertise them because they asked them to. So, today, they tend to keep their distance from such events. However, DaMonzon has another media identity that he uses to get closer to the hunters and their music.

### **‘Donso ka Kene, Araba o Araba’<sup>110</sup>**

Every Wednesday evening from 20:30 to 22:30 Ibrahim DaMonzon Diarra hosts his weekly radio show called *Donso Ka Kene* (hunter's domain) at ORTM Chaîne 2. Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision du Mali (ORTM) is the national broadcasting institution that offers two radio stations, a national format one and Chaîne 2 created in 1993. According to the Library of Congress, Country report (2005), Mali has 125 radio stations, most of them private, that by now this number should have increased. The Malian constitution guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press and the Superior Council of Communication regulates the media. Radio is the primary means of communication. The former government-controlled national radio is now, arguably, officially autonomous.

In 1992 with the establishment of a multi-party democracy, Mali witnessed an explosion of print media. In 2003 there were forty-two private newspapers and journals, the majority of which were published in Bamako; some favour the government, others the oppositional parties. Most of the press is published in French with a few newspapers in Arabic and some notable exceptions in national languages like *Bamanankan* (*Kibaru*, *Jèka baara*), *Fulfulbe* (*Kabaaru*) and *Soninke* (*Xibaare*). The most popular newspapers are the national, daily *L'Essor* and *Les Échos*, both in French. I have found regular entries on hunters in almost every newspaper and journal covering meetings, events and

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<sup>110</sup> Translation: 'Hunters' domain, every Wednesday'

ceremonies along with dedicated articles to specific musicians such as Toumani Kone or Bala Guimba Diakite, Inzan Kone or Yoro Sidibe. Hunters are portrayed as respected, knowledgeable and heroic figures, holders of traditional values and norms that date from the glorious past of the era of Sunjata Keita and the Mali Empire, as I explain in chapter seven.

All radio stations transmit on FM band and information is accessed through local languages, notably Bamanankan. This had a considerable impact on the quality of people's lives and the community. Poverty and low literacy prevent people's access to television and print media, especially in rural areas but also Bamako, leaving radio stations as the main channel for the circulation of information. ORTM operates through a public network of national and regional stations. The local radio stations have formed another network, the Union of Free Radio and Television of Mali (URTEL). Foreign radio programs are widely available through local media. Radio France International, BBC and Voice of America are available with French partnership with local radio stations. A growing number of radio stations in Bamako are being transmitted through the internet, permitting Malian immigrants to have access to local news.

Since 2007 it has been possible to receive the national television channel (ORTM) in Europe via the Eutelsat 7A satellite and a number of other channels have become available more recently. TV5 Monde is the French channel designated to all Francophone countries and can be received from everywhere in Mali. Africable 'la chaîne du continent' is the third channel that transmits in the country. Another satellite, CanalSat Horizons, offers a number of channels from Africa and Europe in English and Arabic.

On 15 July 2009, Madu and I passed the gate of ORTM responding to an invitation by DaMonzon himself. Madu showed his military ID card to the armed guards at the control desk and soon we were in the big yard of the compound planted with trees, shrubs, flowers, and parked motorbikes. The compound consisted of different buildings that host the national television and the two channels of national radio along with their archives, studios and offices. It was late evening and the majority of officials had left for their homes leaving the security guards and armed soldiers behind. At twilight everything looked calm, coloured with a reddish pink that mingled with the brown dust and blue smoke in the air and giving a mauve melancholic tone to the atmosphere.

As we walked into the Chaîne 2 building we saw Da coming down the stairs. We greeted one another at the hall and entered one of the studios from where Donso ka Kεne was transmitted live. Except for specific circumstances where DaMonzon's presence is requested elsewhere, such as business trips to cover political meetings or visits to foreign countries or remote areas within the country, or for the needs and shooting of his television programme, Terroir, DaMonzon chose to present his hunters' music show live. In the cases mentioned above, he recorded as many shows as were needed, in advance before leaving the capital.

Da is a journalist by profession and is proud to present his show in the national language of Mali, Bamanankan. He pointed out the fact that Chaîne 2 is a national language channel and not a French speaking one as many more people understand Bamanankan than French, even up in the North. He also chose to do the formal interview in his native language: "French is not our mother tongue and certainly not the language the donsow speak or sing in. All the nuances will be lost!" Da carried with him a number of cassettes and a track list for that night's show:

1. YORO SIDIBE – MOKO TA DJUKU BE DON: Sessekan (B1)
2. YORO SIDIBE – MOKO TA DJUKU BE DON: Dankouna (B2)
3. SEKOUBA TRAORE – Field Recording of DaMonzon (A1)
4. INZAN KONE – N'TANKOLO: Yala (A3)
5. AMADOU SANGARE – VOL. 13 / SD 170: Nemanassa (B2)
6. TOBA SEYDOU TRAORE – VOL. 4 / SD 201: Nenanifo (A3)
7. ABDOULAYE TRAORE – VOL. 6 / SD 209: Diye laban ni ni tile (B2)
8. SOLEMANE KONATE – DANKOROBA: Doye dodon (B3)
9. IBRAHIM KONIMBA DIARRA – VOL. 2 / SD 221: Sadjona (B2)
10. SIBIRI SAMAKE – WARA DONBALIW / SD 230: Djini Mogotigui (B1)
11. NAMADENI TRAORE – VOL. 2 / SD175: Manioumabali (B4)
12. CHAKA BALLO – VOL. 3 / SD 146: Agnegnini (B2)
13. MOUSSA BLEN SIDIBE – VOL. 2 / SD 177: Djobo da yele (A3)

DaMonzon likes to be in control of his work and is a perfectionist. He chooses which tracks and artists will be played. He does not care about possible trends and he never accepts free samples from music producers and label owners. He wants to buy all the

albums with the budget he has from the ORTM so he can be his own master, owing nothing to anybody else. In that respect DaMonzon is completely different from his private station colleagues who circulate in events recording performances and supporting certain musicians, *somaw*, or individuals for some sort of reward. He wants to be independent, untainted, objective. The track list above confirms this. All ‘schools’ of *Wasulu* donsonkoni are represented: Yoro Sidibe with his entourage of Toba Seydou, Solo and Abdoulaye Traore; his rival and former student Sekouba; his rival Mamadou Sangare; Sibiri Samake, a favourite of the Kontron ani Sane hunters’ association; an army favourite like Inzan Kone; and established names like Konimba, Chaka Ballo and Moussa Blen. Absent are the two other hunters’ styles of music: the Maninka simbi and the Segou donsonkoni. I have to say that he frequently played Batoma Sanogo (Segou) and Bala Guimba Diakite (Manden) but not that time.

DaMonzon cued all the songs. All the sound engineer had to do was to put the tape in the player and press play. All cassettes were produced by Siriman Diallo except those of Sekouba and Solemane. The first was recorded on location by DaMonzon and was a praise song for a *donsoba* from whom Sekouba was demanding fresh meat. The second was produced by Mama Konakew, the producer of Sekouba. The last song on the list by Mousa Blen Sidibe was never played due to the huge volume of dedications.

In the studio we met Kassim Yalkouye the sound engineer. He was a very pleasant hard working young man, who lived very close to where we used to live. Madu invited him to visit whenever it was convenient for him. Madu and I were infiltrating the network of hunters’ music lovers. He told us that Inzan Kone was one of his favourites. Kassim was responsible for all the prerecorded snippets that a listener hears throughout the show between music tracks and speech: *donso ka kɛnɛ, araba o araba* ORTM Chaîne 2 (hunters’ domain, every Wednesday on ORTM Channel 2) or *Kontron ani Sane*, the two ancestral deities of hunters. Recorded digitally, the extracts need just the push of a button to invade the flow of the show and to ensure that the listener stays in tune with the most prestigious hunters’ radio show in Mali.

That night, and while Da was inside the booth, Kassim did the editing of another show coming after this one. The music was Malian pop, more precisely, Mangala Camara and Mata Vieux. He said that there is a Malian living in the USA, whom they have never met, who is crazy about the hunters’ show. Every Wednesday he listens to it



because it is his day off. He has sent many gifts to Da and Kassim, including a motorbike for the latter. In return, they send him every new release of donsonkoni.

In between songs, DaMonzon makes announcements: Sekouba Traore plays this Friday (17/07/09) in Fasokanu; Inzan Kone plays throughout the weekend in ACI 2000 on Friday, in Bankoni on Saturday and in Senou on Sunday at a donso wedding; Solomane Konate is playing in Moribabougou on Saturday. After each song DaMonzon has to announce the dedications of the fans of the show to their friends, colleagues and relatives. The requests for this are usually sent by email, text messages (SMS) and phone calls directly to DaMonzon. “They come from too many people, both men and women, I cannot satisfy them all,” he says. He needs to be selective so many times people get angry and disappointed for not being included in the show. That night DaMonzon dedicated a song to us, *karamɔɔ Teo ani kalanden Madu Traore*. We were both moved and excited. It felt like we were becoming part of this social group of people, the grid, who shared a passion for donsoya. I wanted to dedicate a song to my teachers, Kassim Kone and Mahamadou Konta, hoping that my two *karamɔɔ* were listening to the show. DaMonzon complied, reinforcing the sociality between us.

DaMonzon’s voice is very loud, clear and low. His manner of speaking in a slow tempo and confident declamation is very much shared among radio and television presenters in Mali. It is (and sounds) very formal, leaving no doubt about the seriousness of the spoken words, but at the same time allowing some room for a passing joke or brief anecdote that will lighten the mood. Da’s voice may comply with presenters’ standards but it is also characteristic and unique in its sound colour. Numerous times I would be reminded that it was time to tune in because of his voice coming from car stereos or people’s homes.

After the end of that show we went to DaMonzon’s office to leave his stuff. He made a comment on the situation in the office: “This is the rural radio and all the presenters are peasants. That is why it is in such a mess,” he jokes and everybody there laughs. DaMonzon is a very serious person who can be funny, pleasant and informative at the same time. His reputation precedes him. As Fode Moussa Sidibe once told me, “There are many locked doors in Mali and the key holders will refuse to open them. Once you are with DaMonzon, all doors will open. His reputation is impeccable.”

We exited the building. DaMonzon said he would meet us at our house. We stopped a taxi and negotiated a ride for 1,500 FCFA; it was 22:45. At home, Da repeated

what he was saying earlier. He considered himself lucky to have a steady job with a proper salary. While he got paid by the state every month, his colleagues in the private sector had to earn a living by other means. Private radio stations did not offer their employees monthly salaries. Like Issa, many presenters of private radio stations have other jobs to support themselves and their families but all of them were involved in activities that promote hunters' music and give them access to financial resources.

## **PUBLICITY**

Radio presenters play a major role in advertising hunters' music albums. Producers usually supply the presenters with a 'promo' cassette that has just a couple or only one song of the artist. This is most likely a *fasa*, praise song for one individual, taken from his forthcoming album. Presenters play the sample and announce the release date of the album, so that people know when and where to find it. As Issa points out, producers should be paying the radio stations for this kind of publicity but that is never the case. Publicity is given free because of the relationship between musicians and broadcasters. *Nkonifolaw* are friends of many presenters and hunters. To reinforce this friendship, the presenters play the whole album of the musician so that he gains fame. "We want the *nkonifola* to remember us anywhere he plays, even if we are not present", Issa says, and declares: "musicians have more esteem for us than the *somaw* and the hunters!" Musicians usually reward presenters with small sums of money, to show their gratitude for the presenters' effort. With these sums, presenters buy petrol for transport, cassettes for recording, batteries for their recorders, or a copy of the latest release by their favorite singer. By these offerings the *nkonifola* binds the presenters, who in turn play his albums on the radio.

Promoting musicians and their performances may not be as fruitful economically for radio presenters but there is another indirect form of publicity that proves to be very advantageous in that respect for them. This is the promotion of *somaw*. Healers and sorcerers are always in search of clientele and compete with each other for power and fame. They all use hunters' communication channels to reach a wider audience, such as having cassette releases dedicated to them and their skills, performances where musicians sing their praises, and radio shows. Radio presenters are inclined to attend ritual events that the *somaw* host in their homes where they display their fetishes, such as *arabanikelen*, and other occasions, where there is always live music by *nkonifolaw*

where they record the performances. Later they play them in their radio shows commemorating the event and thus promoting the host, the *soma*, to their audiences. *Somaw* tend to reward these transmissions very generously, in advance, with cash or other forms of payment. There are also cases where a *soma* will be invited to a radio station for an interview and remunerate the presenter, engineer or anyone present as in the case I describe below.

## **AN EVENING AT RADIO DONKO**

For some time, there was a rumour that *somaba* Moustapha Diallo would be giving an interview on radio. A great diviner, sorcerer and healer, Diallo is a child of modernity in certain respects but an individual deeply rooted into tradition when it comes to the occult and its art. He is smart looking and very trendy in a European way, has an expensive taste in cars and clothes, formal suits and jumpers alike. With a reputation that he can achieve anything and everything, it is no surprise that many important men from the spheres of business and politics visit him in his mansion in Farabana to consult him in their affairs. He also proved to be outspoken and polemical when it comes to community issues, marital ethics and monogamy, drugs and alcohol consumption, tradition and modernity, globalisation and contemporary society in Mali. A public moraliser, Diallo surprised everyone present with his firm, balanced speech and clear attitude towards issues that concern all Malians in a changing world. He had the chance to address all these on the evening of the 4 November 2010, live on radio Donko in Kalaban Koro, a neighbourhood south of the river Niger, in Bamako.

After spending the entire afternoon at Solo's home practising the *nkoni*, the students and I jumped in the car to leave for the radio station. Solo was driving as usual. I was crushed between Adama and the left back door of the car. We drove around Daramanbougou to get to the main road, since that seemed the only possible way to get down after the collapse of the little concrete bridge during the summer rains. At Djikoroni we spotted two enormous SUVs with their alarm lights on and several people gathered around them. Solo stopped the car in front of them and a man in a white suit and blue and white striped shirt came to greet us.

Moustapha Diallo shook Solo's hand, then mine and asked in French how I was doing. He gave Solo a 10,000 FCFA bill and told him to fill up the tank of our car. We drove to the closest gas station where Solo asked for 2,000 FCFA petrol. Then we went

back to join Moustapha's entourage. They were ready to go. In front of us rode two motorbikes and we followed them. Behind us was Diallo's Hummer followed by his Land Cruiser. He drove the Hummer himself. They had just arrived from Farabana.

The convoy beeped its horns and kept the alarm lights on throughout the drive. We crossed the river and drove south and uphill to Kalaban Koro, then took a dirt road and stayed on it for about 10 minutes. The dust was incredible. With our windows open, no wonder we arrived red-coloured from head to toe. We got out of the car and everyone in the ensemble grabbed their instrument. I took out my still camera and my voice recorder. Diallo got out of his gold painted Hummer that bore his name in big fat letters on the windshield and was joined by four low ranking army officers who acted as his bodyguards. Solo started playing his harp and singing, walking backwards towards the yard of the radio station, which was based on the ground floor of a two-story building. Outside the entrance there were a few plastic chairs, a table with two speakers and many people who screamed and shouted his name.

A cameraman was documenting the event, whilst the radio presenters were recording Solo's praise singing on their cassette recorders. It was impossible to get near them. People pushed too hard to make their way to Moustapha. I finally found a way to get around the crowd and place myself behind some bushes, facing Solo. I recorded the song and took some pictures. When Solo finished, a griot introduced Diallo and praised his name. As is customary, Diallo responded with gratitude and the griot repeated Diallo's words aloud. The crowd was excited, full of energy and enthusiasm. The performance by Solo, and the speech of the jeli, created an overlapping and interlocking sound pattern along with the participatory sounds of the audience. As Tacchi (2002) notes, sound created imaginaries, Moustapha as a hero, a *soma*, a powerful diviner who can alter the things-to-come. He was praised by Solo, a rising star, a hunters' musician. In Mande culture, these are attributes that only mythical men possess and are able to control. The members of the audience were mesmerised. Some were trying to find a small window between the stretched bodies to have a glimpse of the two men but in vain. The jeli had to stop for it was time to start the radio programme.

They moved inside the building. The crowd wanted to follow them into the radio station. I stood behind the students waiting for someone to invite us in. The soldiers let the radio presenters, the cameraman, Solo and Lansine in. Suddenly they called me to join my team. I entered a tiny room that functioned as a reception hall to the studio.

Hosts and guests were crowded inside the recording room, the size of which was no more than three square meters. I took some pictures and recorded a song that Solo wrote for the great soma: *Da Yelɛ*. It was played by Solo and Lansine on the harps with no other accompaniment and was transmitted live on the radio.

Four radio presenters from different stations interviewed Farabana Moustapha Diallo, soma par excellence, diviner of politicians and powerful men of the business world. He was asked about all things soma, donso and donsonkoni. He talked about proper behaviour, alcohol, smoking, drug trafficking, prostitution, education, respect for the elders and the women. Diallo is a public moraliser. The interviewers kept asking him questions and encouraged long answers by agreeing with Diallo, saying “*uhu*” or *awo* (yes) or *naamu* (the response of a donsonkoni apprentice to the singing of his teacher). The interview started at 21:00 and lasted until 23:30. I stayed for a while inside the building and accepted a cold American Cola but the air was too hot. Brulaye managed to get in and wanted to go into the recording room where the interview was taking place but the soldiers stopped him. Despite his insistence, he was not allowed to play the *kutsuba* inside. “It is too loud”, everyone agreed. They asked me if I needed to go further inside to take some more pictures but I had made up my mind.

I stepped outside to look for my fellow students. They sat on the plastic chairs as they were honoured guests, the apprentices of *nkonifola* Solo Konate. The crowd was sitting on the ground and around the yard. It had become bigger and bigger. Many people had arrived and joined the others in listening to the interview. The emission was transmitted through the speakers on the table and everyone was paying attention to Diallo’s words. Solo was accompanying him with the harp in the background. A woman offered me her seat but I politely refused. Surprised by my Bamana language skills, people turned their heads to face me. Solo started another song and people started to dance; young men imitated the hunters’ moves holding imaginary muskets in their arms; women stood up and started to move their bodies from right to left, their arms extended, as they do in hunters’ public ceremonies. The audience of the radio show was experiencing sound as in performance.

I remembered the time I was living with Madu’s family in El Farako. A hunter used to live in the neighbourhood and used to fire his gun when he was listening to DaMonzon’s *Donso ka Kɛnɛ* radio show. Madu’s wife explained to me that when they first moved there, they feared that something bad was happening until they were

informed that this was the doing of a hunter. He engaged with the music of cassettes played by Da and behaved as in a hunters' event. Later on in my fieldwork, when I listened to hunters' shows in the company of Solo and other hunters, in his compound, I noticed a similar behaviour from them. They listened to the songs, criticised the music that was playing and commented on requests and dedications just as in ceremonies. Radio waves have the power to transport people to the performance site, where identities are contested and reputations are at stake.

That night at Radio Donko I asked Adama what was happening in the yard where we were sitting in the middle of the crowd. He explained that this was the effect Solo has on the crowds. It was his music and Moustapha's speech. Moreover, it was the questions and declarations of the broadcasters, who praised Solo and Moustapha regularly, that excited the members of the people present. Adama wanted to make sure that things were all right inside the station and if Solo wanted anything. I explained that it was very hot and stuffy. Solo could use a drink. People around us were puzzled by our dialogue and tried to place me within the context. Adama finally informed me that a young man present had a moped and he could take me to a place where I could get drinks, not far from where we were.

I soon joined the young man and we drove through the dark dirt roads of Kalaban Koro. Although *kərɔ*, old, it was a newly constructed area. Some buildings were smart, costly mansions but others looked poorly built. There were pieces of land with trees but also a lot of rubbish. The driver stopped for a small top-up of petrol which I offered to pay for. We eventually arrived at a bar and entered the dark yard. There were a few tables around a TV set. Some men were watching a game. A couple of prostitutes came in to see who we are. The air conditioning was on and the room was lit by a few red neon lights. I got five big bottles of Castel beer, greeted the bartender and quickly returned to the radio station.

Adama and Namani joined me in the shade for a drink as Diallo talked about drinking problems. Namani was thirsty and quickly finished his beer just to ask for another one. He did not want to share it with us. We were listening to the warnings of Moustapha about alcohol abuse and watched Namani. For Namani, the event that night was an opportunity to have a few drinks as in performance. He was experiencing it as such. Dressed in his hunters' clothes, he was drinking beer with his fellow students just as in a typical ceremony. As Adama informed me, Solo was disappointed with his little

brother. Namani liked to enjoy life, and indulge in clubbing, drinking, casual sex and music playing. He was proud of his passions and vices. He thought that these were qualities of manhood. Solo thought otherwise. To him, his little brother was an unemployed lazy drunk, a playboy, a worthless young man who provided nothing for his family and wasted his musical talent. In short, Namani was the opposite of Adama. Whilst Adama was closer to the ideal of *donsoya*, Namani had a long way to go. His behaviour was tolerated partly because of his talent but mostly because of his relationship with Solo.

At 23:25 the interview came to a close. The men came out and the crowd cheered again and surrounded them in an asphyxiating circle. With the assistance of the soldiers, our retreat was quick. Diallo jumped on his Hummer after greeting the soldiers. Solo and the ensemble squeezed into the car and the radio presenters got on their mopeds. We followed them all to the main road, eating more dust in the meantime. On the main road, Diallo drove fast and Solo tried to keep up. There was beeping and screaming all along the ride. People came out into the streets to see what was happening. They all recognised Moustapha's Hummer and spotted the *nkoniw* coming out of our car. They greeted us: *! Dansɔɔɔ!* Others screamed and clapped their hands.

At 00:45, we finally arrived at the Sebenikoro bridge. Diallo was driving outside Bamako, to Farabana, so we turned around. There was no need to go further. We did well at the radio station. Solo took me home and stopped outside the house, got out of the car and sent Adama to bring some cigarettes. He needed a smoke. I asked him if he liked the session. 'No, what's to like? Always tin tin tin tin... I enjoyed the beer you offered me though!'

Solo's frustration was totally understandable. Hunters do not like crowded spaces where they are pushed and dragged around by the throng as in the case of the welcoming of Moustapha Diallo outside Donko radio station. They do not like restricted and small spaces either, like the tiny recording studio of the station. Instead they prefer open spaces where they can move at will and cover distances at their own pace. Solo accepted this invitation for a number of reasons: one of the presenters was his close friend Enciene; the interview was advertised so much that it attracted a wide audience and it was an excellent opportunity for self-promotion; Moustapha Diallo is Solo's admirer and patron; and participating in the event was the wish of his teacher, Yoro Sidibe. That night Solo might have suffered from the confining performing conditions

but he benefited immensely from the event. He got substantial airplay and established himself as a favourite nkonifola of Moustapha. The somaba loved his song *Da Yele* and sponsored Solo with a cash amount. My teacher also strengthened his relationship with the other radio presenters through song.

Moustapha, on the other hand, had two and a half hours of exposure to Bamako's public. He ensured his prestige and standing as a valuable member of the society, and community benefactor and sponsor. He re-established himself as a powerful healer and diviner with prestigious and returning clients. Solo's song justified and confirmed Diallo's reputation as a great *soma*, one that future clients will consider seriously if not solely.

That night the four radio producers pulled off something admirable. They managed to persuade *somaba* Moustapha Diallo to give an interview to a private radio station; a mini press conference with four interviewers, a hunters' musician who is a 'rising star' in the hunters' music scene, and a big participating audience around the station but also all over Bamako. They advertised themselves, the station, Moustapha and Solo. They were rewarded by Diallo, ensuring that they will be invited to other events by both *donsow* and *somaw*. But most importantly they promoted hunters' music.

## **CONCLUSION**

Radio presenters of hunters' music programmes in Mali play a significant role in the transmission, promotion and dissemination of *donsokoni*. They make field recordings of performances and use studio recordings from music producers which they play in their shows; they invite exceptional men from the hunters' association, to speak and offer their insights to the wider community; and unfold musical social meaning using their verbal skills to add another layer to the textured soundscape of *donsoya*. In this way, they believe that they complement artists and producers in creating a sonic environment that refreshes memories and feelings of other places and other times and fills the gaps in one's social life by reinforcing sociality. They aspire, inspire and invite audiences to social and musical imaginaries where "overlapping, interlocking" sounds evoke memories from a distant past that stimulate, fortify and promote hunters' identity to Malian audiences. The next chapter examines how these affect the popularity of hunters music in Mali.



## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

# **SPEAKING TO PEOPLE: ON THE POPULARITY OF HUNTERS MUSIC IN MALI**

The harp can be played for everyone: caretakers, mechanics, students, teachers, researchers and all workers. It is loved by everybody so we decided to record and release this music into cassettes. Many people buy the cassettes because they contain preaching words, words about bravery and the songs encourage people in their activities. In contrast to other artists' songs whose themes are about love, romance and the like, hunters' songs are moralising and inspire individuals to do better in their work/activities. Radio and television programmes are organised around *donsoya* on a weekly basis. Every radio station in Mali has a weekly show on different weekdays and weekends (Solomane Konate).

In September 2008, at the end of a brief visit to Bamako, I was stopped for the first time at the passport control at the airport of SENOU by a high ranking police officer who was on duty. He was alarmed to see from my passport the number of times I travelled in and out of the country since 2003, and by the long extensions of my Malian visa. He suspected drug trafficking and ordered an unwilling officer to escort me to another building for questioning, hand luggage search and urine test for illegal substances. The frustrated officer and I went downstairs and outside into the hot and humid night air. As we were walking, he explained that 'the chief' was in a bad mood because of his wife's misbehaviour. The fact that he was put on duty that night did not help at all.

We entered the building and went straight into a room on the ground floor. Three more men were there: another officer, a medical assistant and an employee of the airport. They took a sample of my urine and asked me to open my hand luggage. They very politely explained that all this was probably a misunderstanding; they were just following orders and were sure I was not a criminal or an addict. When I opened the case, they went silent for a moment. There was my camera, laptop, recording gear and about three dozens cassettes of hunters' music. They were stunned and started asking questions. I explained who I was and what I did and was planning to do.

We spent the next half hour talking about *donsoya*, the respect that hunters enjoy in Mali, the importance of their presence and how honourable this research was. Two more men joined us: a janitor and an airport official. All six men were fans of *donsokoni* and we discussed each cassette and musician I had in my luggage. At some point a call reminded the police officer that he had to report back to the chief and we greeted each other until next time. The officer escorted me back to passport control where he explained everything to his superior. The latter nodded and let me pass through. I was left with just enough time for a cold beer before boarding.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I discuss the popularity of hunters' music in Mali, especially in Bamako. I explore the idea of hunters' music as a popular musical genre in the sense that it is 'enjoyed by the people.' I consider its audience; who hunters' music is popular with; why this music is so popular; why ordinary people and hunters enjoy listening to it; and how hunters feel about its popularity, with the aim of answering the question: how does this music speak to Malians and why is it embraced by them?

Since my first encounter with this music in the summer of 2003, this last question has been of particular importance, recurring over and over again. During my fieldwork, I discussed issues around the popularity of hunters' music with my main consultants and also with dozens of other hunters, ordinary men, women, children, and members of the audience in performances, as well as with those unfamiliar with *donsoya*. The latter, although not alien to the hunt and the music, pointed out another activity of *donsow* that made them stay in touch with hunters: that of divination. I argue that divination is a significant factor in the popularity of hunters and their music.

The chapter also functions as a response to Alexander Enkerli's (2003) paper 'Tradition and the Popularization of Hunter's Music in Mali' presented at the African Studies Association annual meeting on 30 October 2003. Enkerli discusses some of the issues with which I am concerned: signs of popularity, such as the presence of cassettes, public performances of *donsokoni*, and the influence this musical genre has for other Malian musicians with international careers; hunters' music audiences; and some of the reasons for its popularity. He points out that the audience for hunters' music performances consists of children, initiated young men and women of all ages and fanclubs. His main thesis is that hunters' music is popular because of the non-ethnic

character of *donsoya* and modern individualism in contemporary Malian society. It also cuts across the age-hierarchy of hunters' associations that allows sons to overcome their fathers (*fadenya* being the main actor in this process); it speaks to the presence of healers in hunters' performances who seek recognition and clients; and finally highlights society's recognition of hunters' musicians as important figures in Mali (*ibid*).

Although my findings support Enkerli's thesis, I argue that there is much more to it than he suggests. Malian society after independence underwent a series of changes as a consequence of modernisation and globalisation that left people exposed to notions of uncertainty with concerns about their future. Their identities now have to be negotiated anew, as they take into account old, solid values and virtues in order to counterbalance external pressures such as immigration from neighbouring countries and Asia, as well as internal ones, such as conflict with Islamic extremists and rebels in the North. I explore these issues in the following pages to show that a great number of parameters need to be taken into account when issues of popularity of hunters' music are in play. I examine the notion of music cassettes as commodities; the relationship between hunters and the state; music and performance as art; the proliferation of hunters' radio shows; notions of identity and memory in hunters' music audiences; the art of sorcery and its practitioners as vehicles of hunters' music; the art of divination and the uncertainty of the 'things to come'; along with old and well established humane notions of *mɔgɔya* (personhood or humanness) and *jigiya* (hope, expectation or benefactor-ship) to conclude that the popularity of hunters' music, although evident in everyday life, is in fact a very complex phenomenon that begs the attention of scholars and researchers.

## **PRODUCERS, CONSUMERS AND THE STATE**

Hunters' music can loosely be described as a 'luxury good' (Appadurai 1986). Originally reserved for the hunter elites, this music is now offered for public consumption. It can be found and bought in various formats (cassette, CD, DVD, Mp3) in the market, but requires the proper equipment for playback (stereo players, mp3 players, and smart phones). It signals complex social messages, like the need for appropriate behaviour, heroic spirit, patience, endurance, old values and norms. Although now accessible to all, hunters' music is generally much better understood and

appreciated by knowledgeable individuals, connoisseurs of the tradition, than ordinary people. And its consumption declares a certain attitude, worldview and way of life, as it assumes implicitly or explicitly identification with the hunters' ethos.<sup>111</sup>

Appadurai (ibid: 33) proposes that commodities "whose consumption is most intricately tied up with critical social messages are likely to be least responsive to crude shifts in supply or price, but most responsive to political manipulation at the societal level." Hunters' music and lore has been repeatedly used by the state to promote unity, brotherhood and stability in a world in flux. Hunters' performative rituals, recordings, and radio shows are seen as an effective promotional tool because they identify hunters' ethos and practice. Hunters' associations have promoted a unified body of power and knowledge since at least the time of Sunjata and the creation of the constitution of Kurukan Fuga, established by hunters. The modern state of Mali endorses such identifiers because of the powerful meanings they embody. In many cases, as I was told, hunters even influence the voting of citizens in presidential elections, especially in the countryside. This makes hunters exponents of electoral persuasion, and promoters or spokesmen for politicians and their parties.

Examples of the state's employment of hunters' brotherhoods are the International Festival of West African Hunters between 26 January and 01 February 2001, organised by Fode Moussa Sidibe with the support of late minister of culture Pascal Baba Coulobaly, its sequel in 2005, and the participation of hunters in every anniversary of Mali's independence on the 22 September. For the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Mali's Independence, hunters gathered outside the stadium Omnisport Modibo Keita hours before the beginning of the celebration. They were dressed in special uniforms

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<sup>111</sup> In his discussion of desire and demand, Appadurai (1986: 29) suggests that instead of assuming that demand and consumption have something to do with desire and need, we should treat them as an aspect of the overall political economy of societies. For example, Alfred Gell's study of the Muria of central India, shows that consumption is closely tied to 'collective displays, economic egalitarianism, and sociability' (ibid). Following Veblen, Douglas and Isherwood (1981) and Braudillard (1968; 1975; 1981), Appadurai proposes that consumption is uniquely social, relational and active instead of private, atomic or passive (ibid: 31). Consumption is about sending and receiving social messages. Demand is determined by, and to an extent manipulates, social and economic forces.

Appadurai (ibid: 38) suggests that luxury goods should be regarded as goods whose primary use is rhetorical and social. They are 'incarnated signs' and not mere necessities: 'their necessity to which *they* respond is fundamentally political' (ibid, emphasis in the original). He prefers to regard luxury as a special "register" of consumption and not as a special class of thing. This register has certain characteristics in relation to commodities: (1) restriction, either by price or by law, to elites; (2) complexity of acquisition, which may or may not be a function of real "scarcity"; (3) semiotic virtuosity, that is, the capacity to signal fairly complex social messages (as do pepper in cuisine, silk in dress, jewels in adornment, and relics in worship); (4) specialized knowledge as a prerequisite for their "appropriate" consumption, that is, regulation by fashion; and (5) a high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person, and personality (ibid).

designed and imposed by the state, but carried their own muskets and rifles. In black and brown-red colours, with designs that echoed the military camouflage outfit, the uniform combined associations with state security along with the traditional hunters' tunic. Most of the hunters I asked did not like it, but many kept wearing it as a symbol, perhaps, of state-legitimated 'extra' authority in events and ceremonies for the rest of that year and the next.

In modern Mali the state and the hunters use each other, blurring the boundaries of political power: the state uses *donsoya* to promote unity and ethos, while hunters' brotherhoods claim financial support from the state. Although there is no evidence to claim that hunters' music shaped and shapes the nation as we find in Askew's (2002) discussion of performing groups in Tanzania, it is fair to say that this music plays a major role in the expression and assumption of national pride. Because of its non-ethnic orientation, a hunters' brotherhood implies unity and stability; its hierarchy suggests discipline and respect; and its democratic administrative meetings demonstrate equality. All hunters are equal, brothers in a disciplined, powerful and militant 'family' serving society. The brotherhood protects and serves, always seeking justice for members and non-members alike. It is hard not to think of Fode Moussa Sidibe's novel *La Revolte de Zangue: L'Ancien Combattant* (2010), where a Second World War veteran and initiated hunter, Zangue, revolts against a corrupted politician and his military accomplices who deliberately kept all veterans' pensions for their own benefit. Zangue leads a group of hunters and eventually succeeds in his quest. The corrupted politician 'gets what he deserves': he is removed and replaced and his accessories punished.

The relationship between hunters' brotherhoods and the state is not one of conflict, resentment and aggression. On the contrary, the state supported the brotherhoods financially, consulted them in matters of internal and external politics and exchanged ideas about environmental issues. Hunters were called to solve disputes (Jansen 2008; Camara 2008). Here it must be noted that all my consultants pointed out the fact that the division of the original *donsotɔn*, Federation National des Chasseurs du Mali (FNDCM), into at least three different *donsotɔnw* - one that retained the original name (FNDCM), another one named Association National des Chasseurs du Mali (ANACMA), and the newest and smallest of the three called Kontron ani Sane (KAS) - was caused by the greed of the leaders of the original association. They wanted a different distribution of the state funds and so they walked out of the FNDCM in two stages. First the ANACMA was formed and then a second group left ANACMA to form

KAS. Hunters' associations and politics, including both their internal politics and the politics of their interactions with the state, is an extremely interesting and under-researched topic that needs to be explored in future research projects. For now, let us turn to the consumer goods that the audience enjoy.

## **CASSETTES AND PERFORMANCES AS WORKS OF ART**

Hunters' musical repertoire is a shared and ever expanding body of work of hunters' musicians. The latter are composing new songs and creating new rhythms to praise exceptional individuals, like hunters or somaw (sorcerers, diviners and healers). Songs are being tested in public performances and events, but also in cassette releases. The men to whom these cassettes are dedicated will be pleased and reciprocate with the musicians in various ways (with currency, material goods or secret knowledge). Furthermore, they will do so in performances. However, it is not just praised hunters or somaw that experience performances or listen to these cassettes. Wider audiences formed by other hunters and sorcerers, and ordinary people, enjoy this music publicly or privately through radio or cassettes. Here I propose that cultural products such as cassettes and performances are works of art and embody Alfred Gell's theory of agency.

In his posthumously published work *Art and Agency* (1998), Gell considers art objects, their agency, and the power they have to influence their viewers. He defines them in performative terms as systems of actions rather than symbols. Works of art are considered as people, 'enculturated beings' or social agents. Gell treats them as a special kind of technology that fascinates the viewer as a result of intelligible mastery. Art, for Gell, is about production, circulation and reception. His main concepts are 'agency', 'index', 'prototypes', 'artists' and 'recipients' (ibid). Agency is mediated by indexes or art works that are modelled on prototypes (i.e. exceptional individuals, or remarkable characters), which are made by artists and viewed by recipients (the audience, the people, the public). Indexes (a term borrowed from Peirce's [1933-58; 1955] triad of index, icon and symbol) motivate responses, inferences or interpretations and can be involved in a variety of relations with their prototypes, artists and recipients. Agency is achieved through technical virtuosity (Gell 1998). In a hunters' music context, cassettes and performances are indexes modelled on hunters (prototypes), made by donsonkonifolaw (artists) and experienced by Malian audiences (recipients).

Gell's theory of art is based neither on aesthetics nor on visual communication. According to him, art's distinctive function is the advancement of social relationships through 'the abduction of agency' (ibid). Works of art then, are indexes or power objects of the artist's or the model's agency. It is through a social network that indexes deploy agency that entangle the viewer and affect his/her behaviour or belief. Gell's study helps depict the ways in which art objects make their 'recipients' do things but he does not engage much with the experiential side of the recipient. Hunters' music uses such social networks to reach its audiences. It is transmitted through the radio and sold at the market in cassettes. Furthermore, it is experienced in public performances and has an impact upon people, as I explain later in the chapter.

According to my consultants, cassettes of hunters' music sell very well.<sup>112</sup> Buying a copy is like supporting a soccer team. As soon as a new album is released the fans of the artist rush to the market to acquire it. They will also attend as many of his performances as possible. As stated elsewhere, these performances are organized by hunters, who choose their favorite nkonifola for the event. They are fans too. I have seen many women, uninitiated men and even children following Solo in his various performances just as soccer fans would follow their favorite team in its various games. They explained that they would 'never miss it for the world.' To them, an artist like Solo is a model human being, a wonderful singer, a skilled musician and an accomplished hunter. He inspires them. Also, admirers of a certain individual like a great hunter or a famous soma, will buy copies of the cassettes that were dedicated to him by a hunters' musician. They want to listen to the praise songs and relate, through these songs, to the praised hunter.

It is rare for professional drivers not to have donsonkoni cassettes in their vehicles. One can listen to hunters' music in taxis and sotramaw (green mini buses). Countless times I listened to donsonkoni from the back of a sotrama while asking the driver who the artist was. In taxis too, I was having conversations with the drivers who happened to play cassettes of Yoro Sidibe, Sekouba Traore and Solomane Konate. On one occasion, when I mentioned that I was a student of Solo, I was offered a free ride; I kindly declined. For the drivers, listening to this music is a symbol of, and encourages boldness at the steering wheel. Many of them work hours on end to earn a living. They

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<sup>112</sup> Figures were never mentioned. However, the fact that new productions are being released, old ones are being reprinted and the fact that Siriman Diallo's small label has become a family business, are indicators that sales make profit for Siriman and his son, along with other producers of hunters' music.

relate their work to the long performances of hunters' musicians. The music keeps them awake, aware and motivated to do the job right. Many of them refer to each other with nicknames such as *simbon*, *karamogo* as if they are initiated hunters; they learn how to dance the hunters' dance and even practise in public during daytime. They identify with hunters and their music but no one refers to himself as *kalanden*, student; they are all supposedly accomplished 'hunters.'

Hunters' music, then, uses technology and the music industry to reach ordinary people who in many cases identify with it. But what happens if such a reach becomes impossible? Or to paraphrase Idhe (1990: 11), we might ask: Could hunters' music live without technologies? Can *donsokoni* live without the music industry, the producers, the media, radio shows and public performances? In such a case, hunters' music would probably move back to its origins. Without cassettes, radio promotion and open events, it would return to its primary and limited constituency: the hunters. So the main question becomes: Is that even an option anymore? The answer I would give is an emphatic 'no'. According to every person I talked to, the hunters' music industry is here to stay. Recordings will always be made, cassettes will always be released, promoted and bought, performances will always be announced on radio shows and attended by the public.

Hunters were always respected and feared at the same time. However, as Modibo points out, the social status hunters have is different from the participation of their music in the music business: "Music remains music." There are matters in *donsoya* that cannot be popularized, such as those secrets reserved for initiates only. The rites and customs that are exclusive to hunters can never be revealed and marketed as cassettes. The men of the media are fully aware of this situation and avoid such danger. Hunters' music, on the other hand, is a genre that people like and it can be marketable. Modibo puts it bluntly: "If the music is a mirror of society, it cannot be the property of hunters only. It will become the property of the community." Hunters themselves enjoy exposure through the media and music. They want their culture and customs to survive, to remain alive. They want people to get to know and experience hunters' music and public ceremonies. Hence, they support efforts such as Modibo Diallo's music productions or DaMonzon's radio show.



## POPULAR MUSICIANS

Among the different hunters' music styles, the most popular is the Wasulu donsonkoni, followed by the Maninka simbi and the Segou donsonkoni. The Wasulu donsonkoni is also by far the most popular of the three styles in Bamako. This is because the language of its song texts is understood by everyone, while the Segou and the Maninka with their different languages are hard for the *Bamakois* to understand. People also say that the Wasulu donsonkoni, with its lively rhythms, pushes people to "do great things", while the Maninka simbi makes people think and meditate. The latter is also much more melodic and people emphasize this aspect of the style, while the former revolves around the words and their meaning.

In Chapter Two, I discussed lineages of musicianship among Mande hunters musicians. Here I focus on the contemporary hunters' music scene. Today's most popular musicians of the Wasulu donsonkoni are Yoro Sidibe, Mamadou Sangare, Sekouba Traore, Sibiri Samake, Solomane Konate, Boublen Kone, Inzan Kone, Diakaria Sangare, Siaka Ballo, Adama Bagayogo, Abdoulaye Sacko, Abdoulaye Traore, Harouna Doumbia, Toumani Diakite. They do not all come from the region of Wasulu. Because of the wide popularity of this style, many musicians from other regions decide to learn and play it. An example of that is Solo himself. That is never the case in the two other known styles of hunters' music. Their musicians are locals, born and raised in the specific musical traditions of Manden and Segou. In particular, the most popular simbifolaw are Bala Guimba Diakite, Sidikiba, and Sina Sinayoko; of the Segou donsonkoni, the most popular are Batoma Sanogo, Jinaden Zoumana Kanta, Fantamady Bouare and the Filanin of Segou. Among the most popular storytellers or *maanabolaw* across all regions and styles is Sambouni Diakite who specializes in the Wasulu style, but also the late Batoma Sanogo from Segou and Bala Guimba Diakite from the Manden.

Many hunters' songs made their way into the repertoire of the *jeliw* (for more information on these see Charry 2000). Other songs entered the *wassoulou* musical genre that gained popularity with modern female singers such as Nahawa Doumbia and Oumou Sangare (see Duran 1995a, 1999, 2000, 2005). The *wassoulou* genre was based on the youths' harp called *kamalen nkoni* that was invented and popularised by Allata Brulay Sidibe (ibid). The instrument is similar to the donsonkoni but smaller and today may have more than six strings, eight being the norm. I will now turn to the conditions

and contexts for hunters' performances in the past to compare what was happening then with what is being practised today.

## **PAST & PRESENT**

With the arrival of private radio stations and their programmes on *donsoya*, along with television programmes, hunters' music became popular amongst Malians generally. The music itself has undergone many changes (see Chapter Three). The repertoire was expanded and new rhythms were introduced to serve new purposes and trends. My consultants frequently stated, "The way *donsonkoni* was played in the past is different from the way it is played now." This distinction is embodied by musicians of the past like Toumani Kone, Saje Diakite or Nkonifo Burama and today's *nkoni* players like Yoro Sidibe, Mamadou Sangare and Solomane Konate. New rhythms were added to the existing repertoire to facilitate praise singing for non-hunters, new songs are being composed to serve new objectives, and performances are becoming more and more secularized to accommodate new and wider audiences.

As discussed in the previous chapters, in the past local people were afraid of hunters. They would avoid close encounters with them. Local people did not attend hunters' events; they would be scared to walk near hunters or sit next to them and would keep away from them. Once considered dangerous persons, feared and admired at the same time, today hunters are very well respected as knowledgeable individuals who retain old traditions and the cultural patrimony of Mali.

Another reason for the relative peripherality of hunters' lore was the exclusivity of religious beliefs, and misconceptions about those religious beliefs. As DaMonzon, Issa and Modibo have pointed out, hunters were regarded by the predominantly Muslim population as 'pagans' who worshipped 'idols'. Islam has been present in the broader area of West Africa since the early tenth century and spread to Mali over a period of six hundred years through various *jihad*. Hunters' societies remained faithful to traditional systems of beliefs based on animistic content and ritual practice. The use of power objects or *boliw* and the art of sorcery enhanced the perception of hunters, by the local people, as infidels and idolaters. Furthermore, hunters' songs were thought to carry messages totally useless by doctrinaire Muslims.

Sales of cassettes were slow until the first International Festival of West African Hunters was organized in 2001. The Festival emphasized the cultural aspects of

donsoya. It promoted the notion of the hunter as a symbol of ‘old customs’, and the nkoni player as a key element in the transmission of Mali’s cultural patrimony. At that point, Issa argues, people started to “understand what donsoya is and what the nkonifolaw were singing about.” They realized that the song texts were like “school books”, full of “useful information”, suggestions and advice for living one’s life. “They contained principles that modern Malian society needs” (ibid).

When hunters’ music was previously played, women were not allowed to attend. Very few women did. These were spouses of hunters assigned to prepare food and did not actively participate in hunters’ ceremonies. Today a large number of women attend hunters’ events and participate in performance by clapping their hands, cheering and dancing to many of the rhythms of the nkoni.

In 2001, the hunters’ music boom started. This was most likely because of the Festival of the hunters, which generated interest in donsoya among Malians. By 2005 many young people had been initiated in donsoya. Cassettes of hunters’ music were selling very well and Malians showed their preference for the music through purchase and patronage. As a result, many young men sought to become nkoni players. Others became involved in music production releasing cassettes on their own record labels although not always with the success of Siriman Diallo whose experience helped him to dominate the hunters’ music industry.

Today hunters’ ceremonies are filmed and broadcast on television. Hunters give permission to the filmmakers to document their public ceremonies, while secret ceremonies are still reserved for initiated hunters only. The music is being recorded and released on cassette, CD and DVD formats by music producers and record label owners. It is available in the market for everybody to listen to and buy. The publicity of donsoya through the media raised awareness with the public who came to know about the brotherhood of the hunters. “They realize that hunters are not necessarily kafir, pagans. Hunters are humans, only extraordinary ones,” Issa maintains. Through major events such as the hunters’ festivals of 2001 and 2005 and subsequent media exposure, the public came to realize that hunters are not evil, or dangerous beings but rather can be “pillars of the community” and “defenders of freedom and humanity.” Malians started to perceive hunters as the traditional and historical protectors of humans from wild beasts, evil spirits and haunted forests.

According to my consultants, donsoya underwent many changes. Some hunters and aficionados like DaMonzon did not see these changes as positive. Hunters inspire respect and being a hunter is very prestigious. For these reasons, numerous individuals enter the brotherhood for their own personal advancement. Belonging to the brotherhood of hunters is like being part of an elite, a private club, or a Masonic lodge that will help individuals to seal business deals or achieve political goals. As DaMonzon puts it:

Things have changed. Today there is much falsity in donsoya. Everybody has become a donso! Donsoya is decaying. Hunters do not like it for nothing. The nkonifolaw do not play for hunters anymore, they do not play for meat. They play for money. They play for rich people only. Even a civil servant can invite a hunters' bard to play and sing for him, praise him as if he was a donso or a soma. He will do that for money. In hunters events, singers will praise just a few hunters and spend the greatest part of the ceremony praising rich people who reward them with money.

In performance the nkonifola may praise hunters, somaw or important figures present in the event. Traditionally, the singer will always ask for meat when he praises a hunter. Asking for material goods and riches is unacceptable and considered malpractice. In cases where the praised individual is a soma, the singer will ask for occult power, magic spells and medicinal remedies. However, in contemporary Mali, singers ask for material goods from the somaw: cash, cars, land and livestock. From non-hunters, musicians will simply ask for money. It is unthinkable not to compensate. If the praised man does not have what he has been asked for immediately available, he has to promise to deliver within the next few days. In case of failure to deliver, he is in potential danger from various sources, including sorcery.

DaMonzon's frustration is explicitly expressed in his comment: "Hunters' music changed completely and became a sumu." Sumuw (pl.) are celebrations/events of ordinary people where musicians, who all belong to the griot (jeli) caste, will ask for money to praise the genealogies of the attendees (Conrad and Frank 1995; Duran 1999, 2007; Hoffman 2000). In a hunters' context, this means that the donsonkonifolaw have forgotten why and for whom they play this music. They ask for money instead of game;

they expect money and are not happy with the symbolic offerings of cola nuts or fresh meat; they follow the somaw around, praising them, recording cassettes and dedicating songs to them to gain wealth. Performance events have become a means to an end and musicianship has become an entrepreneurial profession. In short, hunters' musicians have become just like the griots, and their performances have become like celebrations of the folk or sumu. Although this statement seems like an exaggeration (and it is), the simple fact remains: hunters' music has become very popular among Malians.

### **Nantanw ani Donsow: AFICIONADOS OF DONSONKONI**

Hunters differentiate between initiated brothers (donsow) and non-initiates (nantanw) who attend their performances and listen to their music on cassettes or on the radio. Although hunters are still the primary recipients of hunters' music, they are not the only recipients. The people who listen to donsonkoni today are numerous. Both men and women, old and young, Muslims, Christians, atheists, animists, people of all ages, gender, race and social strata enjoy the songs and recitation of hunters' epics. They all listen to the music because of the messages it carries. People process such messages to extract information, wisdom and courage.

The diversity of hunters' music audiences is especially evident in public performance. On numerous occasions we were surrounded by many different groups of people. At one concert in the Lafiabougou neighborhood of Bamako, organized by the ANACMA to celebrate the anniversary of the brotherhood and the closure of their conference in Palais de la Culture, the crowd was particularly striking. The event, lasting eight hours, started at seven thirty in the evening and had an impressive list of artists. It was announced that Yoro Sidibe, Sekouba Traore, Sambouni Diakite, Solo Konate, Moussa Blen Sidibe and more would all share the same arena. Although Yoro and Sambouni did not make it for their own personal reasons, it was still an event worth experiencing to the end.

The performance area was the biggest I have ever seen, second to a football field. More than two hundred hunters were sitting on their mats. The young ones were facilitating the old ones, running errands and following orders. Behind them and around the arena ordinary people (nantanw) had been gathering since evening. I arrived with Sekou Camara and took my place next to Solo and his ensemble, who were already there. Sekouba Traore was performing. By nine o'clock at night, the site was buzzing

with hundreds of fans of donsonkoni. Young men were shouting the names of the performers and children looked at hunters with awe and fear; young women who were waiting to hear the singing voices would cover their ears at the sound of the musket blow, while taxi drivers who were bringing their clients to the concert stayed to see it for themselves. Sotrama drivers parked their vehicles adjacent to the arena and soon were surrounded by people who were trying to get up on the cars' roofs for a better view. I kept trying to get photos but so many men were blocking my way that it was impossible. They too were taking photos with their mobile phones. Others were filming using the same devices, or recording the performance. The president of ANACMA rushed to these men and fired his rifle in the air. They cleared the ground for a while and he invited me to film. We had met the day before at one of ANACMA's meetings and he had shown great interest in my research. He wanted to help any way he could.

As usual, new arrivals were greeted and escorted into the arena by the music ensemble. Hunters from all three associations were present in the event. Late comers were the somaw. Healers, sorcerers, diviners and magicians tended to arrive late to make an impression on the crowd. Dressed in their ceremonial tunics and holding elaborate staffs they entered the arena one by one and took their seats next to the hunters. The audience applauded each entry and shouted the healer's name out loud for everyone to hear. Somaya has become so popular in Mali, especially in urban centres like Bamako, that healers have gained the status of pop stars. As it was explained to me, not all hunters are happy with this development. Some argue that somaw are practically 'parasites' that enter the association for prestige and to find clients, since, healers, sorcerers and diviners rely on people's money to survive (not the meat they hunt, the hunters are implying). However, some of them are very successful and have gained a level of wealth envied by many executives and politicians. Somaw do not have their own association; I was told this would be illegal. Because of their popularity among people and their wealth, somaw have become very popular patrons of donsonkonifolaw, who praise them on every occasion. The outcome is that the most popular donsonkoni rhythm in Bamako among ordinary people is somafoli, the rhythm of the soma.

The popularity of the somaw, and the hunters' musicians role in cementing that popularity, is apparent from other occasions too. A two-volume VCD (SD220) released by Siriman Diallo documents the public event of the "*Ceremonie de Rencompence a*

*Kontron*” of Moustaph Diallo. Held in his village, Farabana, the long event shows a diverse audience of men and women of all ages, hunters, hunters’ musicians, security guards and army officers, and soldiers in their uniforms and firearms. Part of the event was a parade that included the military band in marching and playing mode. Another example clarifies this tendency even further. Solo gathered us, on one occasion, to go and welcome somaba (great sorcerer) Daouda ‘Sitane’ Yattara, a controversial young man who had been released from prison that day. He had been sentenced to five years for murdering another man. We arrived at eight thirty in the morning and stayed for four hours. Yattara’s compound was packed with young men, followers of the soma. We performed for him in the yard and inside the house as he had been forced to retreat there because of the crowd’s eagerness to touch him and shake his hand. Outside of the compound, the big open field was flooding with cars, motorbikes, scooters and people. A jelimuso arrived with her percussion ensemble to praise Yattara. So did a number of donsonkoni ensembles. In spite of his conviction, his fans were positive that he had not committed the murder but that he had been framed by drug traffickers because of his open declarations against the use of drugs and his polemic against drug dealers. The next day, the word was out all over Bamako: Yattara’s liberation day and welcome to his house had hit the news.



Fig. 28: Solo praising an aficionado of hunters music. Traore was a big fan of Solo attending as many performances he could just like other fans (March 2010).

It is not just the somaw who are fans of hunters' music. Many important figures have declared themselves donsonkoni aficionados. Malians in Europe and the United States listen to hunters' music, especially on the Chaine 2 website, and contact music producers and radio presenters through email or by phone to ask for cassettes. DaMonzon and his team at ORTM regularly send cassettes abroad to such individuals. Malian entrepreneur, Malamine Kone, founder of the AIRNESS footwear label in Paris, proclaims that he only listens to donsonkoni and no other music, according to Solo and Issa. To honor him during his visit to Bamako, the hunters' association formed a welcoming delegation to receive him in his hotel. Solo was the nkonifola who performed for him. Solo told me that Malamine is an ordinary man who can, and frequently does dance the siraba rhythm. When he is abroad he gains courage by listening to hunters' songs, which speak of life's challenges. As we can see, then, hunters' music has evolved to speak to peoples' hearts and minds inspiring and guiding as well as informing people's lives.

In what follows, I argue that, as my consultants told me, contemporary Malians identify with hunters' cultural capital through song and performance, and in the process, increase the symbolic or cultural capital of those songs and performances. They do so by listening to cassettes and participating in public events and ceremonies. They approach donsoya through 'lived experience' and project themselves beyond their identities as Malians, whether hunters or not. They embrace the model of donsoya as manifest by mass media and its representations of hunters and let their emotions of belonging, cherishing, and nostalgia<sup>113</sup> of a distant moral past, guide them through modernity, globalization and the liminality that governs their changing world. They achieve this through processes of socialization and communication.

## **WHY IS HUNTERS' MUSIC SO POPULAR**

According to Diana Taylor (2003: xvi) people learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, cultural agency and by making choices. Through embodied performances people transfer and transmit social knowledge, memory and identity. Performances play a central role in conserving memory and consolidating identity

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<sup>113</sup> Jackson (1998: 96) refers to Noah's 'cultural nostalgia' and alienation that he and other Kuranko felt when they referred to their relationship to the nation-state.



(ibid). Performances, for Taylor, form a *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge while cultural enduring materials form the *archive*. In the Mande hunters' context, the *archive* would include recordings and albums of hunters' music. Unfortunately, sound archives in Mali are restricted to private collections, the ORTM archives and record labels' back catalogues. For hunters' music, the easiest way to find old recordings is to visit ORTM; for new recordings to consult Modibo Diallo or the men working at Mali K7; for field recordings in the countryside, to request from local radio producers. ORTM, which now resides in downtown Bamako opposite to the Hotel de l'Amitie, will soon be changing premises and moving to Kati, a town built around an army barracks, a few kilometers away from Bamako, next to the Presidential Palace on the hill of Kuluba.

Performances, on the other hand, are much easier to find, since all are announced on the numerous hunters' music radio shows. Following Taylor we might rather call them 'scenarios': culturally specific imaginaries activated by theatricality. Scenarios are 'sets of possibilities,' a series of social relations mediated by images, or ways of conceiving conflict, crisis or resolution (Taylor: 13). Using the scenario as a paradigm for understanding social structures and behaviours allows us to draw on the differential concepts of archive and the repertoire discussed above. I consider hunters' performances as scenarios which, in most cases, have recreational aspects. Hunters' performances encapsulate both the set-up and the action/behaviours within a fixed frame that is repeatable and transferable; their transmission reflects the multifaceted systems at work: singing, dancing, reciting, speaking, reenactment, gesture. They are not mimetic or duplicated but rather reactivated; and they require our participation, to 'be there.' Such scenarios position spectators within their frame, implicating them in their ethics and politics (ibid: 33), thus transforming spectators into active participants. Just as with Bourdieu's *habitus*, scenarios consist of 'durable, transposable dispositions' and as such, 'they are passed on and remain remarkably coherent paradigms of seemingly unchanging attitudes and values' (ibid: 31).

Dispositions or habits, imply a tendency to act in a certain way. They are lasting, acquired schemes of perception, thought and action and occur within a conceptual space where the social and the individual meet and interact. Dispositions, therefore, perform and enact preferences and declare them publicly. Music and song, in hunters' worldview, are such dispositions that inculcate the social objective into the subjective.

Hunting themes and moral values expressed in songs and performances oblige hunters to re-act. *Donsokoni* is played, in essence, for heroes. It bewitches them and urges them to do great things and feats. Hunters are such heroes who deal with the natural and the supernatural to protect the community from dangerous animals and enemies, to ensure no shortage of food, to secure the farming fields, to expel malevolent spirits, and to advise people about the ‘days to come.’ People are fascinated by what hunters do in performance. Hunters cast out magic spells, perform magic tricks, exhibit captured animals of the bush such as hyenas, snakes and predatory birds, and recreate scenes from the hunt and dance, mimicking wild animals on the run. For common people, what hunters do is intriguing, exotic and inspiring.

Hunters’ performances or scenarios trigger people’s imagination and memory. Hence they sit comfortably within Taylor’s model. The ideas, morals and notions of bravery carried in songs motivate people, giving them courage to contend with difficulties in life and do well in their professions. The music and song texts inspire people to achieve very high deeds. Hunters’ music does not insult or gossip. The messages that the music carries are “useful, valuable ones that impel the listener to do well in his/her activities” Issa told me. The songs are about ‘doing good,’ and people try to comply and emulate performers. The songs speak to people morally too, urging them to give up vices and embark on virtues. As Issa explained people will think:

Ah, Mr.X did this great thing in performance. Why can’t I myself do as well as him, to be famous like him? I’ll have to work hard so I may achieve his rank. For that I have to become an expert; to be bold and courageous and prove myself to others; to do great things and show to people the value of my work.

As already stated, Schechner (2003: 22) observes, performances are made of ‘restored’ or ‘twice-behaved behavior’: actions that people are trained to do, practice and rehearse. However, they are also re-actions to these actions: ordinary people react to hunters’ performance - the song, the music, the dance - and thereby interpret and give even more meaning to these life stories and legends. Hunters’ stories are life stories that emerge in the course of intersubjective life, of human interaction and ‘always convey this twofold sense of the human subject as *both actor and sufferer*’ (Jackson 1998: 23). Jackson also points out: ‘recounting one’s experiences in the presence of others is a way of

reimagining one's situation and regaining mastery over it. Stories enable people to renegotiate retrospectively their relation with others, recovering a sense of self and of voice that was momentarily taken from them... Narrative thereby mediates a reinvention of identity' (ibid: 23-4). Hunters' songs and epics are life stories of great hunters, living or dead. Hunters' musicians are storytellers that mediate hunters' experience to the public. Hunters who listen to their own stories feel pleasure and contentment; they recover their 'sense of self' from everyday life and reinvent their hunting identity. Ordinary people relate to hunters, enjoy the narratives of the songs, and gain strength and valour to overcome personal difficulties.

The hunters' bard does not play for hunters only. In a hunters' event, he will first play for the *donsoba*, then the hunters, then the *somaw*, and then he will sing and praise important and powerful people. He will also play for the women present or for young men. He will play particular rhythms for all these different groups of people according to their status, gender and age, so they can dance too: "The *nkonifola* will not perform for the hunters only. Never! The *nkonifola* belongs to everybody," Issa contends.



Fig. 29: Solo praising a woman host of the public event, and calls her to dance (December 2010).

The nkonifola plays a key role within donsoya. He can bridge relationships and resolve conflict between hunters by uniting them on stage and making them dance together in the performance ground. He will dedicate songs to them and praise their names and their achievements. He will eventually bring the hunters to reason. The nkonifola is a thread that links people.

On a national level, donsoya plays an important role too. As one of the oldest institutions in West Africa, it has a long history of explorations, wars, kingdoms and empires. The tariku (history) is embedded in hunters' songs and epics. The nkonifola thus becomes the keeper of this history and transmits it to the public through song. Hunters waged wars such as the battle of Lobo Sabusire, and established laws as in Kurukan Fuga (the first ever constitution of the Manden established by hunters in the 13th Century AD). Such important historical events were recreated for the 50th Anniversary of Mali's Independence in 2010 when hunters also marched with civilian teams.

Many of my consultants mentioned that Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT), the former president of Mali, was a great fan of hunters' music. He used to listen to the radio programmes on donsoya. They claimed that people working close to him stated this. Others claimed that it was ATT himself who declared it publicly. Another politician, the president of the Ivory Coast, was fascinated by the story of Sunjata, the hunter-hero-emperor of Mali in 1300s and who was an aficionado of hunters' music, according to Solo and other hunters. Furthermore, the president of Gambia organizes the annual cultural festival of Kanilai and invites hunters from Mali along with musicians. In 2010 Solo was the nkonifola who accompanied the delegation which stayed for nearly a month in the country. Whilst there, he performed every day for different audiences and won two trophy cups.

Hunters play an important role as informants for state and local authorities. As they travel and move around day and night, they are in a position to know everything that is happening in all areas. They may act as the eyes and ears of the authorities to inform about potential dangers. Joseph Hellweg (2004; 2011) has demonstrated how, in the absence of adequate police protection during the 1990s in the Ivory Coast, hunters began patrolling communities against crime. Hunters know which roads are closed or flooded by rain, where criminals might reside or wild beasts that are especially dangerous to humans like wounded lions, lone buffalos, a family of hippos on the move,

or a crocodile that leaves the banks of the river to feed on domestic animals. Nkonifolaw, like the bards of the medieval period, are most likely to transmit this information because they travel a lot. They provide a communication channel in a very effective system of shared information.

I was told that, Amadou Toumani Toure and his government gave priority to hunters' activities and systematically asked for hunters suggestions on state matters. President Toure many times congratulated hunters for preserving the fauna and protecting the forests. Hunters, according to Issa, are the first to be informed about decisions made in the Presidential Palace. Besides having such an influence on the statesmen of West Africa, hunters have the power to sway the public. This power, as with most processes involving the reception of hunters' music, is affected by social and cultural memories. In what follows, I examine how the reception of hunters' music is affected by memory.

## **RECEPTION AND MEMORY**

All reception is deeply involved with memory, because it is memory that supplies the codes and strategies that shape reception, and, as cultural and social memories change, so do the parameters within which reception operates, those parameters that reception theorist Hans Robert Jauss has called "horizon of expect actions" (Carlson 1996 : 5).

Carlson, following Stanley Fish, points out that audiences can be described as interpretive communities in which there is 'a significant overlap of such memory, and the reception process itself might be characterized as the selective application of memory to experience' (ibid). A work of art is framed, as an activity or object created to stimulate interpretation and to invite an audience to interact in this way with it. Such interaction will be primarily based upon their previous experience with similar activities or object, that is, upon memory. Maurice Halbwachs *On Collective Memory* (1992: 38) called it, "The social framework of memory." In performances, expressive movements function as mnemonic reserves, including "patterned movements made and remembered by bodies" (Roach 1996: 26).

Historical and genealogical information has been repeatedly performed and transmitted through ‘memory paths’ (Abercrombie 1998: 6), the ritualized incantations by men, of names of ancestors and sacred places during which they remember and recite the events associated with them. Through these paths, they access ancestral stories, hearsay, and eyewitness accounts. Similarly in Mande hunters’ performance, donsonkonifolaw set off the audience’s imagination and memory by reciting hunting stories and actions of bravery, battles between men and spirits, knowledge and darkness. However, these performances are not the only site for activating this social framework of memory. Public and private radio stations promote this music and invite people to listen to it. Cassette releases of albums containing songs dedicated to great hunters and their achievements attract Malians, hunters and non-hunters alike. Furthermore, people come to ‘love it’ through exposure to hunters’ events and ceremonies in television.

Siriman Diallo started his business by recording and releasing hunters’ epics on cassettes. These stories are considered as history with characters and protagonists. People like to listen to these epic stories, because they entertain them and make them laugh, but more importantly they bring back memories of their cultural heritage. People value the words in songs and consider them to be like lectures in school that can educate them. “It puts people in the right way and motivates them to become good at what they do,” Issa emphasizes. Malians like to hear unbelievable stories about hunters. The way the nkoni players narrate these events is exciting for the public. They also like to hear and watch hunters’ interactions, dances and magical demonstrations. What hunters do in the bush and their homes are appreciated by the public. Modibo tries to explain how he feels when he listens to hunters’ music:

I am left with a feeling of easiness in my mind. The music teaches me. It puts me on the right way. It gives me the idea of loving to become a hero. Donsonkoni is something that I do love more than any other music, frankly. That’s it!

Ordinary people are entertained by the stories and identify with famous hunters/heroes mentioned in songs especially through their jamu, their surnames or clan names. Through their common surname, they become part of the story. The praised hunter becomes either their deceased relative, or, if the hunters is still alive, their brother or father, a figure to admire and respect; a role model. Even when the surname of the

hunter is not mentioned, it is done for a reason: usually hunters and their musicians are identified by the name of their homeland followed by their first name. This underlines the fact that all hunters are brothers and sons of the hunting deities no matter which clan they belong to. However, the ordinary people do know the hunter's jamu because praised hunters are known throughout the country, and can identify with his clan.

Hunters, on the other hand, enjoy this music because it makes them want to do extraordinary things. They are pleased by listening to their names and deeds praised by the singers in public as part of a pantheon of great hunters. They desire to be famous for their prowess, patience and competence to endure the hardships a hunter encounters in his hunting parties. They proudly wear their tunics, carry their rifles and attend hunters' performances. Moreover they seek and buy cassettes in the market to listen to in their homes, during their hunting expeditions or in informal gatherings with friends.

Donsenkoni, therefore, enjoys reception from both donsow and nantanw because it triggers cultural and social memories, be they blood genealogies of great warriors and heroes, or genealogies of apprenticeship. Sacred and secular performances but also commercial releases (or what Taylor calls 'the repertoire and the archive' respectively), and their transmission and dissemination by the media, are central in the process of hunters' music reception. Sound, movement, and song text act as mnemonic reserves that help audiences interpret and interact with the music. However, as I argue below, these are not the only factors that make people listen to hunters' music. Moreover, I claim that other activities, especially divination, particular to donsow and somaw, make them popular among Malians, and are responsible for the expansion and spread of donsenkoni.

## **DIVINATION: NEW PATRONS AND FORTUNETELLERS**

Healers, sorcerers, diviners and medicine men, the somaw play a vital role in the expansion and popularity of hunters' music. They are part of the hunters' association but most of them are not animal killers. The ones that hunt are considered more hunters than somaw. They are very popular in Mali for a variety of reasons. As healers, traditional physicians provide traditional remedies for a number of illnesses and diseases at affordable prices. Malians who cannot afford modern doctors, clinics and medication seek refuge in the somaw. As diviners and fortunetellers, they give advice to people to improve their wellbeing. As sorcerers, they offer their services to



individuals who happen to be in distress and look for solutions to their problems using their occult knowledge. And as professionals, they seek clientele who will compensate for the services they offer. Jackson (1998: 68-75) contextualizes divination and sacrifice among the Kuranko by underlining the search for ontological security. The world of ancestors and God signifies a wider, more manageable world where there is ‘room to maneuver, exercise agency, to act and bargain, to manage and grasp’ (ibid: 72).



Fig. 30: Japren a powerful fetish of sorcerers.

There is plenty of competition among the somaw. They build their own clientele and earn their living from it. Clients are attracted by fame, which implies successful, efficient and skilful practice by the soma. For this reason, the somaw seek publicity. The more famous a soma is, the more clients he will attract and one of the ways to advertise his work and skills is through song; a dedicated praise song to him by a donsonkonifola. The singer will benefit from such a tribute too. He will receive gifts from the soma, a large sum of money, a car, a piece of land, livestock and so forth. Somaw need the nkonifolaw to gain access to people. They reach them through cassette releases and in performance. Their praise songs will also be transmitted through radio and the audiences will hear their names and accomplishments. People are usually intrigued and pay them visits, to consult them on a variety of issues. The somaw then, will do what they do best: perform divination.



Called fileli (seeing), lajeli (watching), or Allakoromomo (fishing the/near God), divination is the art of ‘trying to find what is going on with somebody.’ The soma will use one of the divination systems to read the fortune of an individual, his (or her) state of being, the causes for this present state and possible ways to deal with it. In short, diviners look at the past, present and future of people, diagnose physical, mental or social illness and provide solutions or ‘cures’ for the ‘sick.’

Divination is a practice that crosses religions, as Sekouba explained. In Mali, it is practised among both Muslims and animists. Animists believe that one should always read his future from the beginning of the day and as it progresses, before each and every activity, and before making decisions of all sorts. The Islamic conception is that an individual should consult a diviner on three occasions: before considering marriage, before embarking on a new job or career, and before travelling. Muslims believe that the rest should be left to God’s will. That is not, though, what animists believe who manipulate their future with the help of the somaw.

Fortunetellers (filalikelaw) include all people who read the future. The most powerful are within the ranks of somaw or donsow and are always initiated into a divination system. Initiates can come from any ethnic or social group just like in hunters’ associations. Women are included. After initiation, the apprentice may study with one or more masters. It is considered wise to sit with as many teachers as possible, since each one of them will have different experiences and solutions for the same or similar problems, and the student will gain a wider knowledge of the practice. In Mali, there are many types of divination; some of them are considered universal and can be found across the Arab world, but most of them are indigenous and are practised locally where they might have different names.

By far the most popular divination system is laturu or latru or cæn or tije (truth). It belongs to a group of systems that use sand for divination and its origin is Arabic. It consists of sixteen signs or symbols and its function is described by Mamadou Lamine Traore in his *Philosophie et Geomancie: Vers Une Philosophie Originelle Africaine* (2007). Latru is now accessible through a number of books to people. Even non initiates learn how to practise latru, but they run many risks in doing so. Old masters of the art say that there are specific offerings and sacrifices that need to be made in the immediate or distant future if a sign or symbol appears in certain positions during the practice. These are not written down in any of the books. Instead, they are well kept secrets of the

‘true’ masters who will only pass them to dedicated and faithful students. If these restricted offerings are not met on time, then misfortune threatens the fortuneteller. This is why it is generally advised not to practise divination without the supervision of one or more masters. Another reason for this is the interpretation of the signs, something that is fundamentally important in every divination system.



Fig. 31: Latru sand divination at Solo’s room, Bamako (April 2011).

A good *latrudala* (sand diviner) will know how to practise the sand divination, but he will also have the skills to interpret the signs and their positions. It is perceived that books do not teach this effectively because they are written by single authors and contain just his own ideas, knowledge and experience. The more teachers a diviner has, the better equipped he will be as interpreter. An eclectic accumulation of knowledge from different sources is generally desired, just like in musical apprenticeship. Initiation itself provides both protection from misfortunes and access to privileged knowledge.

The most powerful divination system is *kalanjan*, with twenty-four signs or symbols. It is also a sand divination system, the oldest indigenous system in Mali. *Kalanjan* masters have the reputation of altering people’s lives, or even to be able to kill them through divination and sorcery. They use the signs to perform magic. Signs have many different functions that only true masters of the art know and can use to manipulate the future and make good or bad.

Other types of divination systems are: *filikejila*, a water reading system; *filakebolola*, a hand reading system; *kolonfilila* or *koloni*, that uses cowry shells and is popular among women practitioners; *dubalenfilela*, a mirror reading system; *duga* (vulture), that uses a self-moving fan to give answers; *kanumantu* (the mongers of love), a calabash-based system; *nkon*, another calabash-based system related to the fetish of the same name; *kolongalani*, the small pestle; *borofin* (the black bag), a *komo* divination system; *sulukuni*, an eight sign sand divination system; *bele* (pebbles), an eight sign rock divination system, preferred by hunters; *kunokumala*, a system based on intuition by seeing people face to face; *jinatigi* (master of jinns), a trance-possession system of mediums; and *sabarakoro* (old sandal) or *farani*, a stone divination system favoured by women diviners.

All fortune-telling systems are more related to *somaya* than to *donsoya* apart from the *bele*, which is a hunters' favorite that is used every time they want to go into the bush. Most of the hunters I know also perform *latru*, that has grown in popularity among them. They consider it more flexible and effective than the *bele*. Most of the adult women in Solo's family 'throw the cowry shells' (*koloni*), often during the day in the yard of their compound and discuss the readings. Solo and his two brothers performed *latru* divination everyday for other people and for themselves. Solo, for example, would 'consult the sand' (*latru*) before every trip we made in the countryside. In many cases the trip was cancelled or postponed. He would do the same before every recording we made together or before going into the studio to record his albums, as well as before every meeting of the hunters' association, interview, performance or hunt. Neither Solo nor his brothers considered themselves *somaw*, although they know many of the same things as *somaw*. Solo's friendship with Moustapha Diallo and other sorcerers allowed him to learn many of the secrets of the art of divination from them.

Divination therefore is practised by 'professionals' and 'amateurs' alike. Professionals are initiated to the art of divination and most commonly are *somaw*, *donsow*, or *nkonifolaw*. Amateurs are uninitiated, self-taught individuals who either practise it as a hobby for themselves or for their family and friends, or they try to pass themselves off as professionals and deceive people. Here, I discuss professionals only. Divination is important for hunters in the bush. A hunter needs to know what he will face once in the dark, dangerous and haunted forest; what kind of animals he will encounter; if the path will be free of spirits or calamities. A hunter will also perform

divination for ordinary people, to help them; always for a symbolic sum of money, usually 100-200 FCFA. Hunters claim that they do only good to other people.

A hunter's motivation is to kill wild animals of the bush, not human beings. Somaw, on the contrary, are thought to be able and willing to kill humans, always for a price. Their divination requires domestic animal sacrifices and money. While divination by hunters may require a blood offering of a rooster, that is the most expensive offering that a hunter will ask for. Somaw on the other hand may require a sacrifice of a goat or a cow in order to complete the divination or alter the future. It is said that somaw get money from killing individuals, causing couples to divorce, having men, or women, fired from their jobs and so forth. Ordinary people go to them and pay so they can harm fellow citizens. Sekouba told me that, "A real soma will do more evil than good because he wants to distinguish himself. People will fear this man." Somaw do evil things, then, to show other somaw that they are more powerful, and thereby attract members of the public who turn to them for advice and assistance.

Nkonifolaw (hunters' musicians) need to be all of the above. They have the knowledge of powerful hunters and of the somaw. They educate themselves by being next to both of them, as their praise singers. They extract and demand information or secret knowledge as payment for their services. Without divination skills, musicians are defenceless against other musicians' spells and curses. Every nkonifola must know how to predict danger, affliction and disaster. They must know how to prevent these in order to protect themselves and their apprentices from malpractice in the field, performance and life. Ordinary people also trust and consult nkonifolaw as diviners who can help people with the knowledge they have gathered from hunters and somaw alike.

Fortune-telling is very important to people in Mali: *fosi lankolon te* 'nothing is empty.' All people want to be successful in life, in everything they do. Uncertainty in professional and social life make people go to fortune tellers to advise them on what they must do to achieve their goals. Divination, then, is inevitably linked to what is coming, *l'avenir*. Such a future is always related to the present and the past. A skillful fortune teller will attempt to put individuals on the right track.

## **Mogoya, Jigiya AND THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE FUTURE**

The need for people to know what is coming and be prepared to act upon it is arguably universal. Concepts of 'humanness' and 'hope' may also seem universal, but they

acquire a certain particularity among the Mande people as the latter define and interpret them somehow differently than western societies do. Here I argue that these two concepts central to Mande systems of thought, are important themes in the donsonkoni repertoire. In an ever-changing modernity and the global world order that influences Malian society, hunters' songs prove to be an anchor for hunters and nantanw alike. Songs remind people of values and virtues that tend to fade in the urban context, which exposes people to alienation and deprivation of their cultural heritage.

Mɔgɔya stands for 'personhood' or humanness. Jackson (1990: 63) has discussed mogoya as reflecting 'the ontological priority of social relationships over individual identity' of the Kuranko. He points out that personhood is a concept more abstract and far reaching than in other societies, and 'connotes ideal qualities of proper social relationships' (ibid). Although translated as 'mindfulness of others, generosity of spirit, magnanimity and altruism...[*morgoye* - in Kuranko language]... does not suggest notions of personal identity, distinctive individual character or autonomous moral being. *Morgoye* is a quality of being realized in social praxis' (ibid: 64). In Bamana mogoya stands also for human nature, humanity, adulthood, politeness, goodness, helpfulness and social relations. In this sense, it is culturally specific to the Mande. Jackson (1998: 63-4) contextualizes two important Mande terms, *sako ni dunko* with personhood. *Sako* (death matter) implies social necessity and respect to social ideals, while *dunko* (deep matter) implies personal desire, compulsions and emotional imperatives. The dynamic and moral character of personhood is evident in the continuous balancing of these two notions, that are symbolized by the village (sociality) and the bush (emotion).

In Mande philosophy, sharing what you have with other people is of critical importance. Humanness is about being unselfish, altruistic, generous and giving, thoughtful, caring and noble. It is a concept closely related to *hɔrɔnya*, being a noble, a *hɔrɔn*. Behaving in a noble manner involves thinking of the greater good and embracing all fellow members of the society. After its birth, a child belongs not only to its immediate family but to the whole community: *An den nana* 'our child has come' people will say. Mande people believe that there is no way to know from what or whom this child will benefit. It is therefore in everyone's interest to welcome the child as his or her own. *Mɔgɔya* is also borderless and colourless. The Mande extend this concept to include people who they come into contact with, whether neighbours or distant: Africans, Arabs, Asians or Westerners.

Mogoya is a virtue. One has to be righteous in his life. One must never tell lies. One must be honest and clean, physically and spiritually. Eating healthily, uncontaminated nutriment helps the body stay clean, and when the individual dies, the body will never decay in the ground. “The worms will not eat you”, Sekouba proclaimed. Similarly, the spirit must remain clean by behaving appropriately. Gratefulness is part of being truthful to mogoya. People may feel grateful towards other people even after those people pass away. A man may continue to be grateful to the family of his benefactor even after the latter’s death. Inappropriate behaviour, that is, not following the precepts embedded within the concept of mogoya, will lead people not to trust each other. People will not share knowledge with such an individual. He will never be invited to ceremonies, meetings and events, nor have access to secret knowledge. Such a person will be socially ostracized. Even getting a spouse will be very difficult: as Sekouba mentioned, “It is humanness that will get you a woman, not money.”

In contemporary Mali, urban and rural areas differ in many respects. Large cities like Bamako are similar, in many ways, to modern cities in the West. People spend an increased portion of their time in pursuit of money. Mogoya has been ousted, for the most part, from everyday life. This situation, which is hardly localized, has much to do with the influence of globalization, my consultants protested: “It is here to destroy, uproot our culture [...] turn things upside down,” Sekouba asserted. People blame global mass media, especially the film industry of the West. Individualism, which has historically been considered a post-Enlightenment principle of being independent and self-reliant, is emerging even more prominently. Malians have started to envisage a modern life based on western ideals. Studies abroad also affect individuals and influence changes their dispositions and desires. “There are many who went to school to learn how to read and write but know nothing about our own principles” Sekouba complained, and many others among the hunters’ musicians I worked with agreed.

My consultants worry about this alienation of contemporary Malians from ‘traditional values’ (laada) and concepts such as mogoya and jigiya. Their existence was becoming threatened, detached from Mande society, and their capacity to act diminished. Jackson (2002: 14) perceives human beings’ ‘existential imperative as a *sense of agency*,’ and highlights ‘the human need to imagine that one’s life belongs to a matrix greater than oneself and that within this sphere of greater Being one’s own

actions and words matter and make a difference' (ibid). Present-day Malians may be seen as operating outside this sphere and their actions of no real value or use for the community.

The pursuit of financial resources has become the focus for contemporary Malians. Wari (money) is arguably the most commonly used word in Bamako. Being a fast growing metropolis, Bamako is becoming a contemporary cosmopolitan capital of West Africa and a destination of many international enterprises. Job opportunities arise and people from Mali's countryside and neighbouring countries flow to the city to seek work. In search of easy money, they compete and either succeed or deviate. Fast money sometimes turns people to dishonest men and women.

The will for survival and the need to support family and friends, brings us to the second Mande concept of *jigiya*, hope. *Jigiya* sometimes overlaps with *mɔɔɔya*. People in Mali say that even when one's whole family passes away, he or she can survive but when he loses hope, he is lost. Hope must be ever present and a lack of hope is a sign of impending failure in Manden. One gets hope from others as no one is self-sufficient. All individuals need a 'benefactor,' a *jigi*, 'someone you can rely on.' A *jigi* is someone who supports others, a host who takes care of his guests, a friend who helps another friend in a difficult financial situation or a person who looks after others in sickness and despair. This relationship with one's *jigi* implies completion. Marriage is linked to *jigiya*, as a married couple is completing each other. In a less physical sense, friends complete each other too. Assisting one another is the meaning of *jigiya*. *Jigiya*, therefore, is mutual assistance regardless of social and economic status or sex. One always needs somebody to assist, guide, advise and help. Being a *jigi* is a required quality in the Mande societies: "If you are not a *jigi*, then you are born for nothing. You are nothing", Sekouba declared. A 'benefactor' should help anyway he can people in need.

The concept of *jigiya* also differs in urban areas as class differences become exacerbated. The Bamakois complain that rich people only assist rich people, ignoring the poor, the sick and the needy. Malians blame the 'modern way of life', imposed on them by the West and global economy. Again, individualism and the pursuit of money are considered responsible for the disappearance of traditional value systems such as *jigiya*: "If one lives for money, there is no *mɔɔɔya*, no *jigiya*," as Solo said.

Because of modern, contemporary changes, and the new values and economic systems that globalization brings to developing countries like Mali, especially in urban

areas, people find themselves feeling increasingly lost in a new world. They are challenged morally and feel little or no sense of belonging. Concepts like *mogoya* and *jigiya* are still present, particularly in rural areas outside Bamako, but are also vividly expressed in hunters' songs and performances. Hunters' music is popular among people who still believe in these concepts and values. Just as they feel uncertain about the future, *l'avenir*, and thus consult the diviners for their daily affairs and wellbeing, listening to this music strengthens their hope and gives them courage to deal with a new life in urban environments. Donsonkoni teaches these two concepts constantly through song. As Sekouba pointed out, "Hunters music is moralizing music. There are no void expressions. Every expression or line is meaningful."

## CONCLUSION

Donsonkoni audiences are drawn to hunters' music from different perspectives and for different reasons. Hunters listen to it because they are the main characters, the protagonists, in song. Hunters welcome and enjoy the popularity of *donsoya* and *donsonkoni*. It is a source of pride for them and helps them succeed, prosper and be content. They listen to cassettes of *nkonifolaw* who praise them and their deeds, and feel aroused. Hunters' associations also benefit from the popularity of hunters' music. A lot of young men want to enter the *donsoton*. Some of them will become *nkonifolaw* and others *donsow* or *somaw*. Newcomers to the brotherhood secure its survival. Healers listen to it because they too feature in song and because they associate themselves with hunters and the occult. Ordinary people may be followers of *somaw* and listen to the songs their healer and sorcerer is featured in, or likes. They may be fans of hunters or hunters' musicians who are moved by the stories, the singing, the dancing, or performance in general. Jackson (2002: 18) notes that

By constructing, relating and sharing stories, people contrive to restore viability to their relationship with others, redressing a bias toward autonomy when it has been lost, and affirming collective ideals in the face of disparate experiences. It is not that speech is a replacement for action; rather that it is a supplement, to be exploited when action is impossible or confounded.



For those who feel helpless and alienated by the state, corruption, globalizaion, and poverty in modern Mali, hunters' stories and songs provide comfort and hope, strength and courage, to rectify their ability to act upon their lives. Song inspires and pushes people to act and gain control of their lives. Contemporary Malians might be intrigued by the mystique of hunters or drawn by their moral code and behaviour. Nantanw identify with great hunters and model themselves in life after them. However, it would be too easy and inaccurate to make such distinctions and isolate people and their reasons for such taste in music. I suggest a more holistic approach and propose that it is rather the sum of its parts than the parts alone that make donsonkoni a musical style within the hunters' musical genre that is loved and listened to by contemporary Malians in Bamako. It is a style that speaks to the hearts and minds of people, to their very existence. It provides them with a heroic past, gives them courage to surpass present predicaments particularly as these exacerbated by new challenges posted by social and environmental changes associated with urbanization, modernity, and global economic processes; and promises an auspicious future.

## CONCLUSIONS

### SO FAR AND THE WAY FORWARD

This research project reveals aspects of Mande hunters and their music that were under-researched and never published. Throughout the seven chapters of the thesis, I discussed the existing literature, looked at the educational systems of hunters' musicians and the acquisition of knowledge through experience, practice, and performance. I also looked at the hunters' music styles, with closer examination of the Wasulu donsonkoni, the musical instruments, musicians, songs, rhythms, texts and the symbolism relating to them. A discussion of hunters' performances in sacred and secular ceremonies followed, with particular attention to a hunters-only ceremony at the dankun in Kangaba, and a wedding celebration in Bamako. Then, I discussed the local hunters' music industry and production, especially music producers, field and studio recordings and the relationship between music producers and artists of this tradition; and the radio stations and hunters' music shows, through the specialized radio presenters and their role in the transmission, dissemination and promotion of this music. Finally, I considered hunters' music audiences, its popularity, and how hunters' music speaks to the hearts and souls of contemporary Malians.

Hunters' music has a two-fold function for Malians: it is a window to the past and a window to the future. This music reminds contemporary Malians where they come from, their cultural heritage and ideals, morals and values that built empires, kingdoms and the nation state. It also provides Malians with the means to face *l'avenir*, the-things-to-come, by encouraging them, motivating them and promoting heroes' ethos and determination. Hunters' music is important for the media as well. Through radio and television shows, hunters' music reaches wider audiences, promotes hunters' ideals, and ties people together. Communities are formed around radio stations and hunters' images are entering the living rooms of homes. Hunters' music is like a glue that holds these communities together.

Hunters' music is also important for other musical genres in Mali. Its melodies, rhythms and texts feed the jeli and wassoulou repertoire for many decades now, but also new popular genres like hip hop, electro and pop music. All these musicians appropriate the hunters' musical genre and use the image, status and ideology of

donsoya to make their diverse statements. Solo twice played to me an unreleased recording he made with an electric guitarist that featured keyboards, donsonkoni on what I felt was the most haunting electric guitar that came out of Mali. It is uncertain if this recording will ever reach the market but the point is that such collaborations are at play. We might be witnessing major changes in the world of hunters' music in the future.

Hunters' music is relatively unknown outside West Africa and Mali in particular. Just a handful of recordings are available, mostly releases of existing local cassettes. No recent field recordings made by specialists have been released and there are but a limited number of recordings made by professionals that have been released on non-specialist record labels. The genre and its regional styles was never promoted by world music magazines and remains fairly obscure to the wider public of World Music. However, musicians around the world are aware of the hunters' harp and its music. Some have used it as a sound source to serve their own musical creativity (Don Cherry, Stephan Micus, William Parker etc), but others have learned hunters' songs and perform them in events and at concerts (Cullen Strawn).

Hunters' music is important, I believe, and should be recorded and promoted for a number of reasons. First, it presents a fascinating musical experience: the sound of the harp is mesmerizing, the scraping sound of the *nege* is alerting and the *kutsuba* is soothing in the musical background. On top of these sonic layers, the singing voice of the *nkonifola* is simply captivating. There is of course the language barrier that prevents non-native speakers from understanding the words of the songs. However, World Music lovers, usually, do not let language issues stop them from enjoying the music. Informed liner notes can solve issues of context and provide translations of song texts. Second, it is a valuable source of hunters' lore and oral history as Cashion (1984) has shown before. Third, it is a vibrant musical tradition that is in the process of changes that, through recordings, should be possible to trace these changes historically. Fourth, it is historically important for the birth of African American early music genres, like the blues, showing many similarities in singing contour and riff structure. It is significant to stress that recordings should be made by specialists: local or global, hunters' producers should be knowledgeably presented, technically and contextually; producers need to be aware of the repertoire; they should know the musicians, respect them and develop a

mutual trust. This is imperative in order to be able to get deeper into the tradition and find meaningful songs that lack exposure.

Much of my thesis, is about the ultimate ideals of human ethics and morals especially in relation to the hunters. However, this study is not a hagiography of hunters, hunters' musicians and their associations. I had the privilege to study and work with exemplary men, hunters with high morals, ideals and values that were part of a lineage that is true and faithful to the hunters' code. They have repeatedly pointed out the fact that their world is changing; their country is changing; the people are changing; and the brotherhoods are changing as well. They were not comfortable with these changes and expressed their worries and fears about the future. I have mentioned some of these concerns in a number of sections in the thesis.

Some of these concerns include the use of alcohol and drug abuse. Adama's inebriated behaviour during our stay in Kangaba was criticized by Solo and the delegation. Cemogo Doumbia's stance on alcohol abuse was unwavering; he despised drunken comportment and said so to his apprentices and brothers. In public events hunters would enjoy their drinks secretly. To set the record straight, Adama was a well-respected hunter, soma and friend with an impeccable record, knowledge and ethos. He followed the hunters code and in everyday life, he was open, humorous, ready to help his friends and serve the community. He was loved by all who knew him. Another example of alcohol abuse was when Solo's apprentices got intoxicated, at their own expense, before a wedding celebration. As a result they got tired quickly and Solo had to keep replacing them throughout the performance. The next day he was ruthless towards them. They did not drink a single drop for two months. I was to keep Solo's drink out of sight. The apprentices not even once asked for a sip. They said that, "If that is what our *karamogo* says, then that is what we will do."

Elsewhere, I have mentioned drug abuse. Illegal drugs were easy to find in Mali and prescription drugs could be purchased in pharmacies; in some cases, even over the counter. Drugs were becoming a serious issue in Malian society and many efforts, with substantial success, were made by the state to fight the problem. Although hunters are against drug use, on the whole, some hunters' musicians tend to use them. Solo asked me not to mention any names and not to socialize with those engaging in such behaviour. He was being protective. I complied. Others, too, informed me about drug

abuse among hunters' musicians and Malian youth. All of them were against it and wondered what kind of example these musicians gave to their fans.

I also mentioned DaMonzon's concern regarding the hunters' associations. He was troubled by the fact that *donsoya* became so popular that many people joined the brotherhood for their own reasons. The status of *donso* aspires to respect and implies that the individual is following the hunters' code. He is truthful, sincere, trustworthy; in short, a perfect business partner. Hunters discussed this issue in meetings frequently. These 'new members' were causing distress and trouble to the brotherhood through their scams and frauds. Hunters were wondering how these individuals managed to become members of the associations. Indeed, some had been initiated but others simply faked membership IDs; they had some hunter tunics made and acquired guns. They were simply impostors who claimed to be hunters. I remember an evening when DaMonzon visited me in Madu's house in Sebenikoro and told me that the previous night, one of his colleagues was carjacked, stripped to his underwear and left by the side of the road, just outside Bamako, by four men dressed in hunters' clothes who carried guns. In the following days the police arrested them to discover that they were mere thieves, but not hunters.

I have also mentioned the issue of corruption when I briefly discussed the split of the original brotherhood of Malian hunters. All my consultants were in accordance: the *donsotɔn* split because of corruption. It seems like the leaders of the brotherhood disagreed on the way state funds were distributed among them. Political issues were at play here. A number of hunters were affiliated with political parties and that informed their views on the brotherhoods. The National Federation remained very conservative but the National Association appeared to be more progressive, forward looking and open to new ideas. I was told that although there were three distinct major hunters' associations that disagreed with each other, they appeared united in all national matters. Members from different associations socialized with each other much like members of different political parties do. In fact, the plurality of hunters' associations was regarded as analogous to the plurality of political parties in a democratic state. The topic remains open for research and a priority project for myself.

Hunters and hunters' musicians grappled with these issues. They were discussed in official monthly meetings of the associations but also in weekly gatherings in each neighborhood. In addition to these, hunters met informally in houses and conversed

around major and minor issues that may concern the community and the brotherhood. Solo paid daily visits to Cemogo, our donsoba, and spent hours sitting outside the chief's compound with other hunter-brothers, engaging in discussions. He also received other hunter-brothers in his house every day during our rehearsals or free time. They handled minor situations but also planned their presentations for the official meetings.

For hunters, there is no other way but to comply with their ideal model. As sons of Saane and Kontron, the two deities of donsoya, they have no other choice. They are obliged to follow the hunters' code and if not, they are seen as problematic anomalies or 'imposters', who are called to task by the majority within the hunters' associations. "A true hunter knows only one truth, there are no half truths or lies", Sekouba used to say. However, not all hunters are true hunters: "Donso ani sogofagakela te kelen," they said, which means that donso and animal killer is not one and the same. The former was considered the complete, knowledgeable hunter with virtues and morals; the one who sees beyond the kill, the image and the prestige of this title. The latter was considered an 'impostor', a shallow individual who is selfish and worthless to the community. It was a very common comment that one could hear in hunters' gatherings and meetings but also in public events and celebrations, on radio shows and songs. It was said as an indication, a warning for those who were unaware of these 'impostors.' It was a way for the hunters to clarify donsoya to ordinary people and to distinguish themselves from these individuals.

Hunters were opposed to corruption but they accepted the fact that they had to live in a segregated brotherhood. In itself, the brotherhood of hunters promotes unity, equality and commitment; in this light, the three brotherhoods are an anomaly and an oxymoron. Not all hunters liked it but it was a necessity for now, at least. I was told that Yoro Sidibe tried to bring the associations together and composed a song for that. Unfortunately, his efforts were in vain. However, that did not mean that the members of the three associations did not live by the hunters' code. Hunters who bend or go around the code were heavily criticized and penalized; they were obliged to make offerings, ask for forgiveness and do some community work as compensation.

True hunters do not think of themselves as 'better' than the rest of Malians. They rather think of themselves as responsible for the community. They value individuals who work hard and excel in their field; these can be successful businessmen, honorable politicians, military officers, fine physicians, mechanics, soldiers, police officers,

farmers, blacksmiths, radio presenters and music producers, mothers, housewives and the list can go longer. Hunters are men of action, thus proactive people have their respect. After all, hunters in Bamako often have day jobs. Solo quit his own so he could dedicate himself to the art of the donsonkoni, which provided him with an income to support his family. However, all Malians agreed that hunters are a separate group, distinct from non-hunters, ordinary people or nantanw.

My study, I believe, is a modest contribution to the growing body of literature on Mande hunters, their music, culture, apprenticeship, music industry and mass media, and, by extension, in African studies, anthropology of music and ethnomusicology, socio-cultural anthropology, and as I argue on Chapter Seven, in ‘music and healing’ and ‘religious practices’ in the Mande world. Undoubtedly, there is much more to learn from hunters’ brotherhoods and practices: especially the relationship between Islamic faith and donsoya; the role of women in hunters’ brotherhoods and their status as hunters, healers and sorcerers; hunters’ divination practices; medicinal herbs, healing and the efficacy of them, through an experiential approach for medical anthropology and medical ethnomusicology. Another important theme I only touched upon for reasons of space, is hunters’ ‘music and politics’, and the relationship of hunters’ ‘music and the nation’. This remains to be addressed and explored. The unique rupture of the hunters’ brotherhood in Mali, can provide an invaluable insight as to how the brotherhoods function and negotiate their existence with the state.

## AFTERWORD

As I was finishing writing this dissertation, another challenge surfaced from the north of Mali. After the uprising of three Islamist groups, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA - Touareg separatists fighting for an independent state called Azawad), Ansar Dine (Touareg Islamist radicals), and the Movement for Unity and Jihad<sup>114</sup> in West Africa (MUJAO) - the latter two with ties to al-Qaeda's north Africa branch, called Al-Qaida in the Maghreb (AQIM) - and the occupation of the northern part of Mali since April 2012, the forces were ready to attack and invade Sevare, a small town outside Mopti, where the last garrison of Malian army resides. Beyond Mopti, the road to Bamako was free. There was fear that without external intervention, the Jihadists would eventually take the capital of Mali. It was unclear to me whether the hunters would take action, let alone if they were ready for such action. It remained to be seen if the changing Malian government would endorse the hunters' brotherhoods, and supply them with guns and ammunition to defend their land and people. It was also unclear whether the United Nations, United States or European forces would accept such a gesture from the Malian authorities and assist.

The future looks uncertain once again and people fled from the northern cities to Bamako. In the north, and during the occupation, music was banned, cassettes burned, tape recorders and radios were destroyed, in accordance with *Sharia* (Islamic law). Recently, the occupying forces were targeting mobile phones and mp3 players along with sacred tombs and monuments, purportedly in the name of Allah. It was beyond anyone's imagination what might have happened to the local music industry if they occupy Bamako; what might have happened to musicians who could not find refuge in France or neighbouring countries; and what might have happened to hunters and hunters' musicians, who were regarded by the Jihadists as pagan, animists and infidels. It was my hope that the situation would be resolved before it became even more brutal and that peace would return to Mali. I hoped that hunters' music, and *donsoya*, might inspire Malian people during this period of unrest, grounding them in its values, ideals and morals, motivating them to move on, and encouraging them toward a peaceful future; as it always had done in the past.

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<sup>114</sup> Holy war in the name of Allah.



Just after I wrote these last paragraphs, Madu left Greece to return to Mali on a private matter. Two days after his arrival, France intervened by sending armed forces to Mali. These were soon joined by more forces from other African countries and pushed the Jihadists further to the north, liberating all the major cities within the Malian territory. I found out that hunters had offered their services to the Malian government much earlier, two months into the crisis, but their offer was turned down. They were told to stand by and wait. Eventually, with the French intervention, they were not needed. As Solo explained, the brotherhood instead started collecting money from its members to contribute to the war expenses. The brotherhood also decided to stop all manifestations of hunters, that is, performances and rituals, during the period of the conflict. There were no wedding or child naming hunters' events, not even hunters' ceremonies at the *dankun*, the shrine at the crossroads. Solo had not been performing since September 2012. Instead, he focused on his other types of expertise to sustain his family: he performed divination and healing. He was not the only musician who was affected by this decision. All *donsonkonifolaw* around the country ceased to perform in accordance to the brotherhood's law. Four months later, in January and after the French intervention, the Malian government decided to implement a country-wide curfew and curtailed large gatherings such as public musical performances and events. It remains to be seen what will happen after stability is established in the north and the French have finished their intervention. There remains the issue of re-establishing a politically stable government and electing a new President that Malians trust and of whom the UN and France approve. This will be dealt with in the future elections, planned for early this summer, 2013. Between now and then, though, is the peak of the dry season which used to be the busiest time of the year for hunters and hunters' musicians.

04 March 2013

## GLOSSARY OF SELECTED BAMANANKAN TERMS

Ala	Allah
awo	yes
bamana marifa	Bamana rifle
baara	work
badenya	mother-childness
bala	porcupine
bama	crocodile
bara	calabash resonator
barika	blessing
baro	chatting
bɛrɛn	staff
boli	power object, fetish
bonya	respect
bɔɔɔlan	mud-cloth
bɔɔɔbɔ	competitive celebration of donsoya
bugudi dala	dust diviner
cɛ	man
cɛfɔli	music honoring exceptional masculinity
cɛn	sand divination
cɛso	house of masculinity, where guarded objects are stored and where guarded work is done
cɛya	masculinity
cencenbokulun	canoe making
dagwɛ	(also, dagɛ, dajɛ); roan antelope
dalilu	combination of guarded objects and speech
dankelennabila	highly destructive and elusive wild animal
dankun	crossroads
dankunɔn	(lit., “crossroads watering/giving”); crossroads sacrifice

dɛgɛ	corn-based food
di	sweet, good, tasteful
dibi	darkness, ignorance
diina	religion
dolo	star
donso	hunter
donso daga	hunter bush camp
donso fini	hunter clothing
donso fle	hunter whistle
donso fura	hunter medicine
donso kuma	hunter speech
donso maana	hunter epic story
donso sariya	hunter law
donsoba	elder hunter, leader of a particular region
donsobasigi	inauguration of regional hunter leader on whom administrative power of a deceased donsoba is conferred
donsonkoni	six-string Wasulu hunters' harp
donsonkonifola	player of the donsonkoni
donsotɔn	hunters' association, brotherhood
donsoya	the art of hunting
dɔgɔ	younger brother
dɔɔ	alcoholic drink
dɔnkili	(lit., "calling the dance"); song
fadenya	father-childness
farafin marifa	African-made rifle
fasa	praise
fileli	seeing
filalikɛla	fortuneteller
foli	music
foli yɔrɔ	performance site
fura	medicine

furabola	medicine maker
furu	wedding celebration
garanke	leatherworker
gwa	woven grass shelter
gwala	hammock
gwɔn	baboon
gwensenbilenni	mongoose
hɔrɔn	noble
hɔrɔnya	nobility
jamu	surname
janfa	betrayal
jansa	reward for performance
jeli	hereditary musician
jeli nkoni	jeli harp
jeliya	the art of jeli
jēki	whisk
jēya	clarity
jigiya	hope
jina	(also jinε); jinn or bush spirit
jito	coward
juru	string; debt
jurusen	(lit., “the leg of the string”); riff, melodic string rhythm
kabani	hunter ceremony in Kangaba
kakilaka	black-bellied bustard bird
kalanden	(lit., “child of learning”); apprentice
kalandenya	apprenticeship
kamalen nkoni	six- or eight-string Wasulu youth harp
kami	used in wassoulou popular music
kan	guinea fowl
kangwɛlɛnni	throat, voice, sound
kan jalan	hard or little sound
	dried or stiff sound

dɛgɛ	corn-based food
di	sweet, good, tasteful
dibi	darkness, ignorance
diina	religion
dolo	star
donso	hunter
donso daga	hunter bush camp
donso fini	hunter clothing
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filalikɛla	fortuneteller
foli	music
foli yɔrɔ	performance site
fura	medicine

kan kunmaba	large sound
kan minanen	seized sound
karamɔɔ	master, teacher
karamɔɔya	the art of karamɔɔ
kariŋan	iron scraper used in hunters' music as accompaniment
kilisi	incantation
kogɛlɛn	dangerous affair
kokɔɔ	knowledge and things of the ancient past
kɔkunanni	red-flanked duiker
kɔnɔ	bird, inside, musician, singer
kɔŋinɛ	greater cane rat
kɔɔ	older brother
Kuluba	the hill of Bamako where the presidential palace is situated
kuma	speech
kunfe ko	uncertainty
kunfin	(lit., "black/dark head"); person in whom exists no guarded knowledge
kungo	bush, wilderness
kunsi	post-funerary hunter ceremony
kutsuba	rattan-basket shakers
lajeli	watching
latru	(also, cɛn, laturu, tiŋɛ); sand divination
latrudala	sand diviner
lɛ	warthog
lonniya	guarded knowledge
mali	hippopotamus
mankan	noise
marifa	gun, rifle
minan	bushback
minanjan	giant eland

mɔɔɔ	person
mɔɔɔya	personhood
mɔri	Muslim holy man
muso	woman
musolandi	womanizer
naamu	verifying response to singing lines
nantan	non-hunter, ordinary folk
nankama	capable person with clear life purpose (also karipan); iron scraper
nɛɛ	harp
nkoni	(lit., “cutting across the nkoni”);
nkoni natige	soloistic variation
nkoniba	lead (mother) nkoni
nkoniden	accompanying (child) nkoni
nkonisen	(lit., “the leg of the nkoni”); riff, cyclical melodic string rhythm
nkɔɔni	vervet monkey
numu	blacksmith
nya dɔɔ	millet beer
ɲama	dangerous unseen force
ɲamun	giraffe
ɲani	painful suffering
ɲɛ ɲini	research
ɲɛnɛ	entertainment
sama	elephant
sanga	generation
seliba	Muslim festival celebrating Ibrahim’s ram sacrifice
sensen	waterbuck
sɛbɛn	amulet
sɛbɛn durɔki	amulet-laden performance cloak

sɛgɛsɛgɛ	donsenkoni rattle
sigi	African buffalo
sinankunya	joking relationship
simbi (sinbi)	seven-string Maninka hunters' harp
simbifola	simbi player
simbonsi (sinbonsi)	(also kungsi); post-funerary hunter ceremony
sogo	wild game, meat
sogojalan	dried meat
sogolajakara	meat-drying rack
soma	principled sorcerer, diviner, healer
sorofe	nightingale
sɔn	kob antelope
subaga	malevolent sorcerer, witch
sumu	non-hunter celebration
sunkalo	Islamic month of fasting
tanw	hartebeest
tariku	history
tɛrɛmeli	bargaining
timinandya	wisdom
tɔn	association, brotherhood
tɔnsara	brotherhood payment for transgression of hunter law
tubabu	white man
tubabu marifa	(lit., "white man's gun"); imported gun
waa	resonance
waraba	lion
warabilen	patas monkey
wari	money
warakalan	leopard



wassoulou	genre of popular music that began in 1950's Wasulu
Wasulu	region in southern Mali
wooro	kola nut
wolo	pheasant
yoro	place
zigzag	variations, improvisations on the donsonkoni rhythms
zonzani	African savanna hare

# APPENDIX I

## NTANAN BY SOLOMANE KONATE

An ka sabari

Jo fen bæε b'i da

N'keto juru min fola nin

Nin te fo kodonbali ye

**Namu**

Su ntanan fo kan

Manden ni Wasolon ntanan kan ye

A te fo la bæε ye

Nba Solo bæne donsow wele so ni

kungo

**Namu**

Ka minokodamina donsow wele

**Namu**

Ka konkodamina donsow wele

**Namu**

Ka sa ka kunu donsow wele

Ka dingalamini sabaw wele

Bæε man kan

Sankinw k'aw ni wula

Su ntanan kan nin

Aaa Ala

Nin bæε fo donsow ye, takama yiriw

Nba dinya kelen sumuyoro di

Let's be patient

Anything that stands up will lye down

The string I am going to pluck

It is not played for an ignorant

**Yes, it's true!**

Dead people's Ntanan is being played

The ntanan from Manden and Wasulu is  
being played

It is not played for everybody

Well, Solo is going to call the hunters  
from home and from the bush

**Yes, it's true!**

I am calling hunters who can endure  
thirst

**Yes, it's true!**

I am calling hunters who can endure  
hunger

**Yes, it's true!**

I am calling hunters whodied and came  
back to life

I am calling the huge snakes who roll  
around the world

People are different

Sankin snakes, good evening to you

Dead people's ntanan is heard

Ah God

It is played for hunters, the walking trees

Well, the world is a playing ground

Dinya t'an toyoro di

Jikoroni Solomani, n' bada julu ta  
dinya lon o lon

A be n' miiri jigi kulnjan na  
Julufa Yoro la

Sadan Yoro  
Julufa karamogo wele

Fo Ala, konodennin te konoba  
nyakonbola don kelen

Sa dunu kan men  
nyinama dununnin  
N'be nkonifola dow kofa  
Ka Bala Ginba wele  
Juru nin be fa Cemogo ye  
Jikoroni Cemogo ye  
Mansa denke, ka bo Ngabakoro  
**Namu**

Makura denke  
Jikoronikaw ye donsoba ko a di

Be man kan  
Comun katr donsoba i ni wula, i ni  
su  
Yanto tinsye ma diya nima la

**Namu**

Hee ee dinya ke t'an sumuyila di

The world is not a place where we will  
stay

Solomane of Djikoroni, any day I play  
my strings in this world

They remind me of the kulanjan bird  
They remind me of Yoro, the string  
player

They remind me of Sadan Yoro  
Let's call for master Solo

It's not because of God, the little bird  
cannot become equal to the mother-bird  
in one day

Listen to the dead people's drum  
to the drum of the living

I quote some hunters' bards  
I call for Guimba from Bala

This string is played for Cemogo  
For Cemogo from Djikoroni

The son of Mansa from Ngabakoro  
**Yes, its true!**

The son of Makura

I am talking about the chief of hunters of  
Djikoroni

People are different

Chief of hunters of Commune IV, good  
afternoon and good evening

The dust-omens to stay here, have not  
been favorable to any soul

**Yes, it's true!**

Hey, the world has become a playground

Dinya t'an toyoro di

Mumu de kulu

Dantemen muku fini, o te kulula

Namu

Donsow ma ban

Donsolu bada dokoya

Namu

Cemogo le, ka bo Jikoronin

Namu n'terike

Makuda denin sankin ko o di

Binna woyo sa

Namu

Mansa den foronto ko a di

Ka bo Ngabakoro

Foronto i ni wula

Dinya sumu di

Dinya t'an toyoro di

Namu

Julu nin be Cemogo wele

Ka Jikoronin Cemogo wele

Julu nin be Cemogo wele

Ka Kolokani Cemogo wele

Julu nin be Cemogo wele

Ka Ngabakoro Cemogo wele

Ka bo Ngabakoro

Dinya bada ye

Dinya t'an toyoro di

Namu, o te

The world is not a place where we will  
stay

Gunpowder may roar

But the cloudy powder of eccentricity  
does not roar

Yes, it's true!

Hunters' are not finished

But hunters have become rare

Yes, it's true!

Hey Cemogo from Djikoronin

Yes, it's true my friend!

I am talking about the little sakin snake,  
Makuda's son

The whistling snake of grassy lands

Yes, it's true!

Mansa's son, the chilly pepper is called

He comes from Ngabakoro

Good evening, chilly pepper

The world is a playground

The world is not a place we stay

Yes, it's true!

This string is calling Cemogo

It's calling Cemogo from Djikoronin

This string is calling Cemogo

It's calling Cemogo from Kolokani

This string is calling Cemogo

It's calling Cemogo from Ngabakoro

He comes from Ngabakoro

The world is a playground

The world is not a place we stay

Yes, it's true, it is not!

Cɛmɔɔ Dumbuya

Fakoli kunba

Fakoli daba

Jukuru kuruma

Jukuru ndasidila

Bila ye sala

Bila tɛ kɛla kɔnsɔn di

Fakoli nalen kolokolo kulun kɔnɔ

Ka bɔ Makan

Jikɔrɔnin foronto, i ni wula, i ni su

Sankin k'i ni wula

Namu

N' b'i lamanyɔkɔn donso dɔw kofɔ  
i ngina

Dɔw ye sa la

Dɔw ye nyinama la

Kelen kelen faga tɛ bolonda banna  
molokɛ babya

Mɔɔɔ dɔ ye sa la

Dɔ ye wolo la

Karandenlu karamɔɔ lala

Bakari Sidibe lala, Ntomikɔkɔbugu

Namu

Cɛmɔɔ le,

Somala worotobɛ min

Bɛɛ man kan

Fablen lala Somala

Namu, n'terike

Cemogo Doumbia

Fakoli with the big head

Fakoli with the big mouth

When kuruma throws its spines apart

No one can resist its spines

Bila will choose to die

But will never accept to be caught as  
slave

Fakoli came in a kolokolo canoe

He came from Mecca

Chilly pepper from Djikoroni, good  
afternoon and good evening

Sankin snake, good afternoon

Yes, it's true!

I'm gonna tell you about some of the  
hunters who can be compared to you

Some are dead

Some are alive

Dying one by one wont finish a clan  
except lack of procreation

Some people pass away

Some others come to life

The teacher of learners has laid down

Bakari Sidibe has laid down in

Ntomikorobougou

Yes, it's true!

Hey Cemogo

Where is the woroto-snake from Somala

People are different

Fablen has laid down in Somala

Yes, it's true my friend!

Gejuma bε min  
 Lasa Gejuma bε min  
 I lamanyɔkɔn donso bid'i dokon  
 O bid'i masuma  
**Namu**  
 Tarawere den ni nεge lala  
  
 Kanfa Tarawere ka bɔ Jikɔronin  
 Fulabugu Musa bε min  
 Alu tolen morifamuku dɔ, Jikɔronin  
  
 Donsow siyaman lalen  
 Donsow siyaman lalen  
 Torakɔronin giun guin bε min  
 Bεε man kan  
 Negesaman bε min  
 Ne tolo dununkan dɔ  
 Kadoguelɛnfaga sinbokε lala  
 Yirimaguelɛnfaga lala  
**Namu**  
 Tingεbagaw ya dankun bid'i dokon  
 O bid'i masuma  
 Kamara Sanyo donso la'Ala!  
 O bε miiri ji kon kulanjan na  
 Sidoba Macε la  
 Julu nin bε sinbon wele, Yasagi  
**Namu, o bε kε**  
 N' b'i lamanyɔkɔn sinbon jon wele  
 so ni kunko  
 Sankare Tumani so kɔnɔna,  
 Sabalibugu

Where is Gejuma?  
 Where is Lasa from Gejuma?  
 A hunter like you has hidden himself  
 He has calmed down  
**Yes, it's true!**  
 Young Traore and the iron have laid  
 down  
 Kanfa Traore from Djikoroni  
 Where is Musa from Fulabougou?  
 Alu was killed by gunpowder in  
 Djikoroni  
 Many hunters have laid down  
 Many hunters have laid down  
 Where is the owl from Torakoronin?  
 People are different  
 Where is Negesaman?  
 I hear the drum  
 The hard-skin piercer has laid down  
 The hard-bone crusher has laid down  
**Yes, it's true!**  
 The crossroad of truth-sayers has hidden  
 He has calmed down  
 Sanyo Camara has laid down, oh God!  
 He reminds me of the kulanjan bird  
 Mace from Sidoba  
 This string calls Yasagi the hunter  
**Yes, it's true!**  
 Which hunter, like you, am I calling,  
 from home and the bush  
 Sangare Toumani from Sabalibougou  
 has gone back

Woroto bi d'i mala  
Nba Musa Kulubali bi d'i mala

K'i ma dunun kan men  
A te fola bee ye

Namu

Torokorobugukaw ya sankin bi d'i  
dokon

Bee man kan

Buran Kulubali

Buranjan lalen, ee Ala!

Fase Dunbuya be min

Namu

Ka Klenkaw ya wele

Mansa den ntoro fere wele

Jiri juku fere

Jakite Nfali ba ka donso banki

Namu

Cemogo le,

N'be donsow kofu i nyina

N'be donsow kofu i nyina

N'be konkodomina donsow kof'i  
nyina

Ka minokodomina donsow kof'i  
nyina

Ka sa ka kunu donsow kof'i nyina

Dow ye su la

Dow ye nyinama la

The woroto snake has calmed down

Well, Moussa Couloubali has calmed  
down

Have you not heard the drum?

It is not played for everybody

Yes, it's true!

The sankin snake from Torokorobougou  
has hidden (himself)

People are different

Buran Couloubali

Tall Buran has laid down, oh God!

Where is Fase Doumbia?

Yes, it's true!

I call the chilly pepper from Klen

I call the figure-tree flower, son of  
Mansa

I call the flower of the dangerous tree

Diakite Nfali's mother gave birth to a  
hunter

Yes, it's true!

Hey Cemogo

I will talk to you about hunters

I will talk to you about hunters

I will talk to you about hunters who  
endure hunger

I will talk to you about hunters who  
endure thirst

I will talk to you about hunters who died  
and came back to life

Some are dead

Some other are alive

Namu, Ala

Motikaw ya foronto bi d'i dokon

Bεε man kan

Bazumana Sogore bi d'i la

Yanto ma diya nima la

Ne tolo dununkan do

Dinya waati di

Namu, wuya tε Ala

Ka Konate Sungalo wele

Ale ka wadakalan ntura ke

denkundi saga di ten

Dinya bεε nyina

Ka Dunbuya den ni neke fana wele

Ase Dunbuya, Fakoli

Namu

Ka Siyama Bakayoko wele

I lamanyonkon donsow bεε wele

Ne tolo dununkan na

Girinkumεkaw la sankin lala

Waranin lalen, Ala

Fankelen bε min

Dogoduman Fankelen bε min

Somalakaw la woroto bi d'i dokon

Somala

Terεman lala Somala

Hamdammaye sayafen d'i dogon,

Salify Jalo

Namu

Yes, it's true, God!

The chilly pepper from Mopti has hidden

People are different

Bazumana Sogore has laid down

Staying here has not been favorable to  
any soul

I hear the drum

The world is temporary

Yes, it's true, it's not a lie God!

I am calling Sungalo Konate

He used a young male panther as a  
naming ceremony ram

In front of the world

I'm calling young Doumbia and the iron

Ase Doumbia, Fakoli

Yes, it's true!

I'm calling Siyama Bagayogo

I'm calling all hunters like you

I hear the drum

The sankin snake from Girinkume has  
laid down

Waranin has laid down

Where is Fankelen?

Where is Fankelen from Dogodouman?

The woroto snake from Somala, has  
hidden himself in Somala

Terεman has laid down in Somala

The lethal thing of Hamdallaye, has  
hidden himself

Salif Diallo

Yes, it's true!



Komandan Bakayoko bi d'i mala

Namu

Ntalan kan ye

A tɛ fola bæɛ ye

Kulubalike ni nɛgɛ bi d'i dogon

Fotiki Kulubali, kulanjan bi d'i mala

Namu

Cɛmɔgɔ le,

Namu

Jikɔrɔnikaw la Balakɔrɔ bi d'i dogon

na ma

O bi d'i masuma

Donso ni nɛgɛ bi d'i mala

Namu

Hee k'i ya dununnon kan

A tɛ fola bæɛ ye

Namu, wuya tɛ

Donsow ma ban

Donsow bada dɔgɔya

Namu

Marifatigi ni donso tɛ kelen di

Wulalandi ni donso tɛ kelen di

Fodolandi ni samɔkɔ tɛ kelen di

Tɛkela jolima dɔkɔ yalen

Namu, o bada dɔgɔya

Mamadikaw la donso Bala lala

Commander Bagayogo has calmed down

Yes, it's true!

The ntanan is heard

It is not played for everyone

Couloubali and the iron have hidden themselves

Fotiki Couloubali, the kulanjan bird has calmed down

Yes, it's true!

Hey Cemogo,

Yes, it's true!

Balakoro from Djikoroni hid himself from me

He has calmed down

The hunter and iron have calmed down

Yes, it's true!

Hey your little drum is heard

It's not played for everybody

Yes, it's true, not a lie!

Hunters are not finished

But hunters have become rare

Yes, it's true!

Gunman and hunter are not the same

Bush-lover and hunter are not the same

Field-lover and farmer are not the same

Hands stained with blood have become rare

Yes, it's true, they are rare!

Bala, the hunter, from Mamadibougou has lain down

Kitakaw ka donso Bala be min  
Fakuru be wele  
Ne tolo dununkan do  
Ka Kitakaw la Fakuraba wele, Ala

Namu

Kitakaw la donsoba bi d'i dokon

Be man kan  
Mamadi Sidibe be min

Namu

Jikoro mi Solomani, n' bada julu nin  
ta dinya lon o a be n' miiri jikin  
kulanjan na  
Bankinda bado sumana

Hawa Nyaman donso lalen, Ala

Namu

Ka Mamadu Dunbuya wele Kita  
koro  
Ka Danfali donsokɛ fana wele

Namu

N' be donso mawe  
Ka donso mawe  
Togoma n' yili do  
Kulikoro koro, n' ka sinbon jon kofi  
nyina  
Dinya kel'an sumuyoro di  
Dinya t'an toyoro di

Namu

Where is Bala, the hunter from Kita?  
I'm calling Fakuru  
I hear the drum  
I'm calling the great Fakuru from Kita,  
oh God!

Yes, it's true!

The chief of the hunters of Kita has  
hidden himself  
People are different  
Where is Mamadi Sidibe?

Yes, it's true!

I Solomane from Djikoroni, whenever I  
play this string, it reminds me of the  
kulanjan bird  
The cheer-raiser of Baginda has calmed  
down

Hawa Nyaman, the hunter, has lain  
down, oh God!

Yes, it's true!

I'm calling Mamadou Doumbia from  
Kita

I'm also calling Danfali, the hunter

Yes, it's true!

I'm calling the hunters  
and calling the hunters  
While walking slowly with wisdom  
In Kulikoro, which hunter do I want to  
talk to you about?

The world has become a playground  
The world is not a place where we'll stay

Yes, it's true!

Kulikɔrɔkaw ya foronto bi d'i dokon

Bɛɛ man kan

Fanyɔn Jara, Jara Kɔnɛ

Kɔnɛ Kombokanba

Kɔnɛ jiba min

O fana ma ye fɛlɛ min do

Kɔnɛ muso den ma ye fɛlɛ min do

A kelen fɛlɛbolo gnansan di

Namu

Hee, su selen a cɛmina do

Dinya waati di

Donsolu n' b'aw wele

Aw ni su

Aw ya dunun kan

Ko man di bɛɛ la

Namu, an k'an sabali

Cɛwulenin bɛ min

I lamanyɔkɔn foronto do wele

Ne tolo dununkan do

Ka Kulikɔrɔ negɛsama wele

Kulikɔrɔ baro diyalen n' na

Namu, ko barika

Cɛkɛbalo donso lala Segu

Namu

Sankaw ya Solomani lala

The chilly pepper from Kulikoro has hidden himself

People are different

Fagnon Diarra, Diarra Kone

Kone Kombokanba

Kone, the drinker of big waters

The hunting-party he hasn't taken part of

The hunting-party Kone woman's son hasn't taken part of

This part will have turned into a useless errand

Yes, it's true!

Hey, the night has reached the time of catching heroes

The world is a temporary place

Hunters, I am calling you

Good evening to you

Your drum is heard

Not everyone is bound to succeed

Yes, it's true, let's be patient!

Where is Cewulenin?

I'm calling a pepper like yourself

I hear the drum

I'm calling Negesama from Kulikoro

The performance in Kulikoro has been good for me

Yes, it's true, blessings!

Ceke Balo, the hunter has lain down in Segou

Yes, it's true!

Solomane from San has lain down

Bakoroba Dambele, o be min

Namu

Nin be n' miiri jigin sa korɔ caman  
na

Sitan Moro fana bi d'i dogon ne ma  
o bi d'i masuma

Sagaba be min

Moromorɔ Sagaba be min

Segela Jigi lala

Jigi koro worɔ

Namu

Dankun ne ten malimɔli

Ka Ali Kamisoko wele

Ka Filiba fana mawele

Ka Konjanbugu woroto do kofɔ i  
nyina

Burama Konate

Namu

Ka Salakaw ya dunu wele

Sala Amadu

Namu

K'i lamanyɔgɔn foronto do wele

Beɛ man kan

Kabaya Brulaye be min

Su kolen donsokew la yɔrɔ caman

Beledugu Filikɔrɔ be min

Benbenben wuluke bolokolon te

Delimanfen dun te koloko juguya di

Cɛbakɔdo sɔn kɔdo i labara la

Where is Bakoroba Dembele?

Yes, it's true!

This reminds me of many bygone heroes

Sitan Moro too, has hidden himself from  
me, he has calmed down

Where is Sagaba?

Where is Sagaba from Moromoro?

Jigi from Segela has lain down

Jigi with the six horns

Yes, it's true!

He was a very dark crossroad

I'm calling Ali Kamisoko

I'm also calling Filiba

I'm talking to you about a woroto snake  
from Konjanbougou

Bourama Konate

Yes, it's true!

I'm calling the rooster from Sala

Sala Amadu

Yes, it's true!

I'm calling a chilly pepper like you

People are different

Where is Brulaye from Kabaya?

Night has caught hunters in many places

Where is Filikoro from Beledougou?

A vicious dog is never empty-handed

Eating a customary food is not a symbol  
of addiction

The hero gets thin from not getting  
something he is addicted to

Wolonkama nankama te koninya  
Jonni bæε n’i ladokan  
Jon bæε n’i lakununkan  
Cekuda bæ min  
Cekuda, i ni wula la  
Bokun ye jamu de ye dununya kɔɔ

Namu

Kolokani Cemogo

Namu

Mansa denke, i ni wula la  
Ne tolo dununkan dɔ

Comune kat donsoba le,  
I ni wula, i ni su

Namu

Dunun nin bæ kulanjan wele  
Burama Kulubali

Namu, wuya te

I lamanyogon donso caman bæ  
wele

So ni konko, Manden ni Wasolon

Ka Mutikaw ya sankin wele  
Ka Cour d’Appel Lassi fana wele,  
Ala

Ka Amadu la bæε wele

Cemogo le,

Nba ntana te fola mogɔ ye sanu y’i  
bolo

No need to become rival of a predestined  
person

Every slave has his fate

Every slave has his destiny

Where is Cekuda?

Cekuda, good evening

The reason of being born is to look for  
fame in the world

Yes, it’s true!

Cemogo from Kolokani

Yes, it’s true!

Good evening son of Mansa

I hear the drum

Hey chief of the hunters of Commune IV

Good afternoon and good evening

Yes, it’s true!

This drum is calling the kulanjan bird

Burama Couloubali

Yes, it’s true, there is no lie!

I’m calling many hunters like you

From home and from the bush, from  
Manden and Wasulu

I’m calling the sankin snake from Mopti

I’m calling Lassi, working at Cour  
d’Appel, oh God!

I’m calling Amadou and others

Hey Cemogo

Well, the ntana is not played for  
someone who owns much gold

A tɛ fɔla mɔɔɔ ye wadi y'i bolo

It's not played for someone because he owns much money

A tɛ fɔla mɔɔɔ ye k'i ye sadama di

It's not played for someone because he is a beloved person

A tɛ fɔla mɔɔɔ ye k'i tɛ sadama di

It's not played for someone because he is not a beloved person

A tɛ fɔla mɔɔɔ ye i ka di dununya  
ye

It's not played for someone because the whole world loves him

A tɛ fɔ mɔɔɔ ye i ka guwo dununya  
ye

It's not played for someone because he is loathed by the world

Sa tɛ mɔɔɔ tola k'i ka di dununya  
ye

Death will spare no one because he is loved by the whole world

Sa bada kɛ mɔɔɔ tola k'i ka di  
dununya ye

If death can spare someone because he is loved by the whole world

Ala kira Mahamadu bɛ min  
Tinyɛtigi tɔɔɔman

Where is Prophet Mohammed?

Where is the namesake of the truth-owner?

Kankan Sekuba seginna Kankan

Sekuba from Kankan has gone back to Kankan

Konate Cɛguɛ bi d'i la  
Sibila karamɔɔɔ bi d'i la  
Karamɔɔɔ bɛ min

Konate Cegue has lain down

The master from Sibila has lain down

Where is the master?

Dugabugu Siraman bɛ min

Where is Siraman from Dougabougou?

Wɔlonin karamɔɔɔ bɛ min

Where is the master from Wolonin?

Yanto tinyɛ ma diya nima la

The dust-omen to stay here has not been favorable to any creature

Namu, o ma diya nima la

Yes, it's true!

N' b'i lamanyɔɔɔn sankin dɔ kofɔ i  
nyina dununya dɔ

I'll tell you about sankin snakes like you in the world

Manden ni Wasolon

From the Manden and Wasulu

Ne tolo dununkan dɔ  
Ka Korika Sedu wele  
Waraba Caco  
Ale ka mɔgɔ mina mali to kunknnya  
kelen dɔ  
mukukan nya kelen

Namu

Cɛmɔgɔ le,  
Nba n' b'i lamanyɔgɔn donso dɔ  
kofɔ i nyina  
Kalabankaw ya donso Sule bilɛn  
O bi d'i masuma  
Nba ntanan bɛ n' miiri jigin donso  
jɔn na  
Ka Sinawulen ni nɛgɛ kofɔ i nyina  
Faraba tɛ so

Namu, ko barika

Filamuso den de ye mɔgɔ nani ye  
Jalo ni Jakite, Sidibe ni Sangare  
Sirifinna muru jugu lala

Koyan Bu lala Sirifinna  
Faraba Dayi Sɔ  
Su selen barokɛyɔɔ dɔ

Dinya waati di  
Ka Farakaw ya Wudun Sɔ fana  
wele

Namu

Ale ka warakɛ kaba di ne julufɔ  
kɔnɔ ma

I hear the drum  
I'm calling Korika Sedu  
I'm calling Waraba Caco  
He killed the man-eating hippo with one  
shot of his gun  
with one shot of his gun

Yes, it's true!

Hey Cemogo  
Well, I will tell you about a hunter like  
you  
Sule, the hunter from Kalabankoro has  
fallen, has calmed down  
Well, ntana reminds me of whom?  
I am talking to you about Sinawulen and  
he iron  
Faraba is no longer at home

Yes, it's true!

The Fula woman gave birth to four sons  
Diallo and Diakite, Sidibe and Sangare  
The dangerous knife from Sirifina has  
lain down

Koyan Bu has lain down in Sirifina  
Dayi Sow from Faraba  
The night has reached the time for better  
performance

The world is temporary  
I'm also calling Wudun Sow from  
Faraba

Yes, it's true!

He gave a lion's leg to me, the string-  
plucker

N' ke kaba dunya la  
Kamalekaw ya woroto be di  
Be man kan  
Lasina kuduni lala Kamale  
Saya balu te bola nyinama ye  
**Namu**  
Ne be Mamadu wele  
Ka Sibi Mamadu wele  
Mamadu Wolo wele Sibi kono  
Ale ka sogo kunturun di ne julufa  
kono ma

Togo songo  
**Namu**  
Ka Sibikaw ya Naren Musa wele  
Ka Banankorokaw ya donso Alu  
fana wele  
Ka Nafajikaw la Kasun Fode wele,  
ee Ala

Ne be Nyamankolon wele  
Ka Nafaji Nyamankolon wele

**Namu**  
Ne be Numori wele  
Ka Tikon Numori wele  
Tikonkaw ya Solomani be min  
Cemogo le,  
Mansa denin guinguin, k'i ni wula  
Mansa den sitana toro

Yiri jugu fere  
**Namu, wuyo te**

So I may wail in the world  
Where's the woroto snake from Kamale?  
People are different  
Short Lasina has lain down in Kamale  
Death will spare no creature  
**Yes, it's true!**  
I'm calling Mamadou  
I'm calling Mamadou from Sibi  
I'm calling Mamadou Wolo from Sibi  
He is the one who gave a whole antelope  
to me, the sting-plucker  
As a price for fame  
**Yes, it's true!**  
I'm calling Naren Moussa from Sibi  
I'm also calling Alu, the hunters from  
Banankoro  
I'm calling Kasun Fode from Nafadji  
Oh God!  
I'm calling Nyamankolon  
I'm calling Nyamankolon from Nafadji  
**Yes, it's true!**  
I'm calling Numori  
I'm calling Numori from Tikon  
Where is Solomane from Tikon?  
Hey Cemogo,  
Little owl, son of Mansa, good evening  
The Satan in Mansa's son has not  
calmed down  
Flower of the dangerous tree  
**Yes, it's true, there is no lie!**



Fakoli i ni wula, i ni su  
Bila kelen dugu nyemene di

Ne teri ni wula la  
Su selen giunguin gɛɛn dɔ

Bɛɛ man kan  
Sinbon k'i ni wula  
Cɛmɔgo i ni wula  
Ne k'i wele fabonmɛn n' fa  
K'i wele babonmɛn  
K'i wele duga Mansa ye fanani na  
Nba ne bada n' teri ye

Donso n' bada n' teri ye  
E tolo tɛ su ntanan kan na  
A tɛ fɔla bɛɛ ye  
Hee ee dinya kɛl'an sumuɔyɔɔ di  
Dinya t'an toyɔɔ di

**Namu**

Saba kunu sa  
Saya kulukan ma mɛn  
K'i ma dunun jugu fɔ kan mɛn  
Kulanjan bi d'i la  
Sama Buran lala Filadugu  
N' bɛ donso dɔ wele  
N' ka donso dɔ wele

**Namu**

I lamanyɔɔ sinbon dɔ wele  
dununya dɔ  
Manden ni Wasolon  
Ne tolo dununkan dɔ

Fakoli, good afternoon and good evening  
Bila has become the headlight of  
villagers

Good afternoon my friend  
The night has come to the meeting time  
of owls

People are different  
Good afternoon, great hunter  
Good afternoon Cemogo  
I'm calling you in the family of fathers  
Calling you in the family of mothers  
Calling you as a Mansa of the village too  
Well, I have seen a friend

Hunter I have seen a friend  
Haven't you heard the ntanan of the  
dead? Its not played for everyone  
Hey, the world has become a playground  
The world isn't a place we'll stay

**Yes, it's true!**

The big snake which devours snakes  
No one can hear death roaring  
Have you not heard the dangerous drum  
played? The kulanjan bird has lain down  
Sama Buran of Filadugu has lain down  
I'm calling one hunter  
Calling one hunters

**Yes, it's true!**

I'm calling a great hunter like yourself  
in the world  
In Manden and in Wasulu  
I hear the sound of the drum

Guɛrɛntɛ Yiri sinbonkɛ wele  
Jikɔroni  
Ka Dunbuya den ni nɛgɛ wele  
Agibu Dunbuya  
Fakoli ka ko caman kɛ n' ye  
Namu

Ka Filadugu Solomani wele  
Solomani Dawo wele  
Ka bɔ Filadugu  
Namu

Kaba taga diyalen n' na

N' ka julɔ nin fɔ jɔn ye  
Ne tolo dununkan dɔ  
Saya ma nyi  
Fode ni nɛgɛ lala Kaba

Namu  
Solomani donso lala  
Julu nin bɛ Sori wele  
Badala Sori wele  
Donso wele nyinama mina

Ale ka sogonyinama ddi ne julufɔ  
kɔnɔ ma  
Tɔgɔ sɔnkɔ di  
Ka Farabana guinguin wele,  
Farabana  
Mustafa Jalo Farabana  
Ka jagatutigi Mustafa Jalo wele,  
Farabana

I'm calling Guerente Yiri, a great hunter  
from Djikoroni

I'm calling young Doumbia and his iron  
Agibou Doumbia  
Fakoli did many things for me  
Yes, it's true!

I'm calling Solomane from Filadougou  
Calling Solomane Dawo  
From Filadougou  
Yes, it's true!

The travel to Kangaba has been good to  
me

Who did I play the strings for?

I hear the sound of the drum

Death is bad

Fode and his iron are lying down in  
Kangaba

Yes, it's true!

Solomane the hunters has lain down

This string is calling Sori

Calling Sori from Badala

Let's call the hunter who catches living  
game

He gave a living antelope to me, the  
string-plucker

As price for fame

I'm calling the owl from Farabana,  
in Farabana

Mustapha Diallo from Farabana

Calling the owner of Jagatu, Mustapha  
Diallo from Farabana

Ka lɔnnitigi Mustapha Jalo wele,  
Farabana  
Ka japrentigi Mustafa Jalo wele,  
Farabana  
Ka hameritigi Mustapfa Jalo wele,  
Farabana  
Ka sokɛtigi Mustafa Jalo wele,  
Farabana  
Kadoguɛlɛnfaga ni  
yirimaguɛlɛnfaga

Saba dusu tɛ bɔla  
Dauda Yatara wele  
Namu, ko barika  
Ka Baransankaw la donso Sedu  
wele, eh Ala  
Dantuman denke  
N' b'i lamanyɔgɔn donso caman  
wele  
Ne tolo dununkan dɔ  
Balansankaw ya numu bi d'i la

Dantuman numuke bi d'i mala  
Julufɔ Solo jigilamɔgɔ dɔ bada kadi

Julu nin bɛ Sanbo wele  
Hamdallaye Sanbo wele  
Namu  
Ka Sikoroni dunu wele yee  
Fula Bu ka sitana ma suma di

Namu

Calling the owner of knowledge,  
Mustapha Diallo from Farabana  
Calling the owner of Japren, Mustapha  
Diallo from Farabana  
Calling the owner of Hummer, Mustapha  
Diallo from Farabana  
Calling the owner of male horse,  
Mustapha Diallo from Farabana  
Piercer of hard skins and crusher of  
tough bones

A big snake os patient, cool blooded

I'm calling Daouda Yattara

Namu, it's true, blessings!

I'm calling Sedu, the hunter from  
Baransan, oh God!

The son of Dantuman

I'm calling many hunters like you

I hear the sound of the drum

The blacksmith from Balansan has lain  
down

Dantuman, the blacksmith has lain down

One of the benefactors of Solo, the  
string-plucker, was broken down

This string is calling Sanbo

Calling Sanbo from Hamdallaye

Yes, it's true

It's calling the rooster from Sikoroni

The Satan in Fula Bu has never calmed  
down

Yes, it's true!

Ka Tarawerekaw ya dankun wele

Yamurujan Tarawele

Namu, wuya tɛ

K'a denke sinbon kofɔ i nyina

Ne tolo dununkan dɔ

Ko Sajo sitana ma suma, Ala

Ka Nyakanakaw ya Yakon wulen  
wele, Nyakama

Cɛmɔgɔ le,

N' b'i lamanyɔgɔn donso caman

kofɔ i nyina

Ne tolo dununkan dɔ

Ka Ferentumukaw ya kulanjan wele

Nun Fede wele, Ferentumu

Cɛmɔgɔ Dunbuya

N' bɛ donso jɔn kofɔ i nyina

N' ka donso jɔn kofɔ i nyina

Banko taga diyalen n' na

N' ka dunun nin fɔ jɔn ye

Donsokɛ ni nɛgɛ bi d'i la

Usumani Dunbuya, Fakoli lalen,

Jamanjan Koli, a bɛ n' hakili jigin  
kulanjan na

Ba Nanin den Modibo la

Sankin Ala, ale ka samanyin di ne  
julufɔ kɔnɔ ma

Ko kumabaliya man di

Namu

I'm calling the crossroad of the Traore  
clan

Yamurujan Traore

Yes, it's true!

I'm telling you about his son, simbon

I hear the sound of the drum

Say, Sajo's Satan has never calmed  
down, God!

I'm calling Red Yakon from Nyakana, in  
Nyakana

Hey Cemogo,

I'm telling you about many hunters like  
you

I hear the sound of the drum

I'm calling the kulanjan bird from  
Ferentoumou

Calling Nun Fede from Ferentoumou

Cemogo Doumbia

Which hunter am I telling you about?

Which hunter did I tell you about?

The trip to Banko has been good for me

Who did I play this drum for?

Hunter and iron have lain down

Ousmane Doumbia, the Fakoli, has lain  
down, Jamanjan Koli reminds me of the  
kulanjan bird

Reminds me of Ba Nanin, Modibo's son  
God, the sankin snake gave an elephant  
tusk to me, the string-plucker

I say, not to speak is not good

Yes, it's true!

N' bɛ donsolu wele  
N' ka donsolu mawele  
N' tɔkɔma n' yiri dɔ  
Ne tolo dununkan dɔ  
Ka Siyanbakaw ya dan Karima fana  
wele

Ka Sanankɔrɔkaw ya Senke wele

Namu

Dunun nin bɛ Nci wele  
Farabala Nci wele  
Farabala kɔnɔ  
N' b'i lamany'g'n sinbon dɔ wele

Ne tolo dununkan dɔ  
Ka Semana Cɛkura wele,  
Semana

Namu

Semanakaw ya lanfenjugu bi fɔ,  
Somana

Namu

Donsow bi d'i mala  
Donsow bi d'i mala  
Ne tolo dununkan dɔ  
Nanyama dennin foronto lalen

Nanyama Adama di  
Babu Jara bɛ min

Namu

Hee su bada se dun dɔ  
Dinya waati di

Namu

I'm calling the hunters  
And calling the hunters  
While I'm strolling around slowly  
I hear the sound of the drum  
I'm also calling Karim, the buffalo from  
Siyan

I'm calling Senke from Sanankoro

Yes, it's true!

This drum is calling Nci  
It's calling Nci from Farabala  
He is living in Farabala  
I'm calling a hunter who can be  
compared to you

I hear the sound of the drum

I'm calling Cekura from Semana

Living in Semana

Yes, it's true!

The lethal seed of Semana salutes you,  
in Semana

Yes, it's true!

Many hunters have passed away

Many hunters have passed away

I hear the sound of the drum

The chilly pepper, son of Nanyama, has  
lain down

Nanyama Adama has lain down

Where is Babou Diarra?

Yes, it's true!

Hey, the night has become as deep as a  
pool, The world is a temporary place

Yes, it's true!

N' ba julu fo n' teri ye

Julukan ka suman

Namu

E tolo te dununkan na

Dinya waati di

Namu

Donso min bada wa wada kele do

Ntanannin be fi ye

A te fol'i nyina

Namu

Donso min mana wa samakela do

Ntanan be fi ye

A te fol'i nyina

Donso min mana wa mali tingue

kelayoro do

Ntanan be fi ye

A te fol'i nyina

Namu

Donso min bada wa wadakalan

kelayoro do

Ntana be fi ye

A te fol'i nyina

Namu

Julu nin folen Cemogo ye

Jikoroni Cemogo ye

Makura denke

Juru nin folen Cemogo ye

Tabakoro Cemogo ye

Play the string for my friend

Your strings are slow

Yes, it's true!

I hear the sound of the drum

The world is a temporary place

Yes, it's true!

The hunter who goes for a battle with the  
wild beast

The ntana will be played for him

But it won't be played at his presence

Yes, it's true!

The hunter who goes for a battle against  
the elephant

Ntana will be played for him

But not played at his presence

The hunter who goes to a battle with a  
hippo with white forehead

Ntana will be played for him

But not played at his presence

Yes, it's true!

The hunter who goes to a battle with a  
panther

Ntana will be played for him

But not at his presence

Yes, it's true!

This string was played for Cemogo

For Cemogo of Djikoroni

Makura's son

This string was played for Cemogo

For Cemogo of Tabakoro

Mansa denke  
Juru nin folen Cemogo ye  
Kolokani Cemogo ye  
Ka bo Jikoronin  
Marifa nεε donni Cemogo do  
Faraba kuru ma diya  
Marifa nεε donni sinbon do yen  
Bεε man kan  
Jikoronin Cemogo la

Ka bo Jikoronin  
Namu

Cemogo sigilen ye Jikoronin  
Namu, i ma wuya fo de  
Jikoronin guede bi d'i dogon

O bi d'i masuma  
Kulubali Saman donso lala,  
Jikoronin  
Namu  
Fajigiba be min  
Dauda Jalo donso bi d'i mala  
Ka Isifu Jalo donsokε wele,  
Jikoronin

Namu, wuya te, Ala  
N' be donso min kofɔ i nyina  
N' be donso min kofɔ i nyina  
Hee sinbon ne nal'i badola  
Aaaaawiiiii  
Dinya waati di  
Ka julufɔ Yoro wele

For Mansa's son  
This string is played for Cemogo  
It's played for Cemogo from Kolokani  
But living in Djikoronin  
Gun bullets went through Cemogo  
The battle of Faraba hills wasn't good  
Gun bullets went through simbon there  
People are different  
They went through Djikoronin Cemogo's  
body

He comes from Djikoronin  
Yes, it's true!

Cemogo is living in Djikoronin  
Yes, it's true, you spoke no lie!  
The guede of Djikoronin has hidden  
himself

He has calmed down  
Saman Couloubali, the hunter, has  
calmed down in Jikoronin

Yes, it's true!  
Where is Fajigiba?

Daouda Diallo, the hunter, has lain down  
I'm calling Youssouf Diallo, the hunter,  
from Djikoronin

Yes, it's true, not a lie, God!

I am telling you about a hunter  
The hunter I am telling you about  
Hey, the simbon I came to play for you  
Aaaaaaeiiiiiiii!

The world is a temporary place  
I'm calling Yoro, the string-plucker

Sadan Yoro

N' bε donsolu mawele

N' bε donsolu wele

N' tɔgɔma ni yili dɔ

Ne tolo dununkan dɔ

Guɛrende Yiri sinbonkε wele, Ala

Namu, wuya tε

Ka juluto Solo kanunyɔgɔn dɔ wele

Bεε man kan

Karimu Tarawele, Lafiabugu kɔnɔ

Nba, muru b'i ban

Turamakan t'i ban

Tanba d'i ban

Turamakan t'i ban

Ba mana fa

Ko bakɔ Mansa

Ba mana ja

Ko Turamakan tεgε ban

Karimu Tarawele

Numunkukaw ya sankin bi d'i

dogon

Bakarifin lala

Nyaganyagabatigi bi d'i mala

Namu, wuya tε Ala

Ntanan kan ye

I'm calling Sadan Yoro

I'm calling the hunters

I'm calling the hunters

While strolling around

I hear the sound of the drum

I'm calling Guerende Yiri, the hunter,  
God!

Yes, it's true!

I'm calling one of the fans of Solo, the  
string-plucker

People are different

Karim Traore, from Lafiabougou

Well, the knife may rebel and refuse

Tiramakan never rebels and refuse

The spear may rebel and refuse

Tiramakan never rebels and refuse

When the river overflows

People call him King of the other bank of  
the river

When the river dries up

People call it the place where Tiramakan  
crossed the river

Karim Traore

The sankin snake of Numuku has hidden  
himself

Bakarifin has lain down

The owner of nyaganyagaba has calmed  
down

Yes, it's true, not a lie, God!

The sound of ntana is heard



A tɛ fɔla bɛɛ ye

Namu, wuya tɛ

Kadoguɛɛnfaga ni yirimanguɛɛn  
faga

Bokudun sanguana

Fɔbaga damɔɔnkɔ

Jikɔɔɔninkaw ya Cɛmɔɔɔ

Nin bɛɛ y'i badokɛkan ye dununya

Jikɔɔɔninkaw ya Cɛmɔɔɔ

K'i tɛ ne sɔ jamu na

N' k'i son dɔɔɔ la

Cɛbakɔdo jamu sɔɔɔbali welekiya

tɛ n' kɔɔɔ

Nnnn, an k'o la dugumakolo dɔ ten

K'o masumu

It's not played for everyone

Yes, it's true, not a lie!

The piercer of hard skins and crusher of  
tough bones

The big flute of chit

Soils the mouth of the one who plays it

Cemogo from Djikoroni

All these sounds are to entertain you in  
this world

Cemogo from Djikoroni

Do give me a surname

I will give you a first name

I don't know how to praise a man who  
has no surname

Nnnnnn, let me put this song  
underground here

and sniff it!

## APPENDIX II

### FREQUENT ABBREVIATIONS

**ANACMA:** Association National des Chasseurs du Mali. National Association of Hunters of Mali.

**BuMDA:** Bureau Malien du Droit d'Auteur. Mali's Office for Artists' Legal Rights (copyright).

**DNAFLA:** Direction National de l'Alphabetisation Fonctionnelle et de la Linguistique Appliquee.

**FCFA:** Franc Communauté Financière Africaine. The currency in Mali and many West African countries.

**FNDCM:** Federation National des Chasseurs du Mali. National Federation of Hunters of Mali.

**KAS:** Kontron Ani Sane. The third, in size, hunters' association in Mali.

**ORTM:** Office de Radiodiffusion - Television du Mali. Office of Radio & Television of Mali.

### FACTS OF BAMAKO

The district of Bamako is divided into six communes, distinguished by numbers since Ordinance No. 78-34/CNLM of 18 August 1978. Each commune is administered by the municipal council and a mayor is elected. The communes are comprised by certain named neighborhoods. More specifically:

**Commune I:** includes the neighborhoods of Banconi, Boukassombougou, Djelibougou, Doumanzana Fadjiguila, Sotuba Korofina North and South Korofina Sikoroni.

**Commune II:** includes the neighborhoods of Niaréla (the oldest), Bagadadji, Medina-Coura, Bozola, Missira, Hippodrome, Quinzambougou, Bakaribougou, TSF, Industrial Area and Bougouba

**Commune III:** the administrative and commercial center of Bamako. It accommodates in particular the two largest markets in the capital, the Grand Market and Didida. It has twenty neighborhoods and includes the villages Koulouninko and Sirakorodounfing.

**Commune IV:** includes the neighborhoods of Taliko, Lassa, Sibiribougou, Djikoroni Para, Sébénikoro, Hamdallaye, Lafiabougou and Kalabambougou.

**Commune V:** includes the neighborhoods of Badalabougou, Sema I, Quartier Mali, Torokorobougou, Baco-Djicoroni, Sabalibougou, Daoudabougou and Kalaban-Coura.

**Commune VI:** includes the neighborhoods of Banankabougou, Djanékéla, Faladié, Magnambougou, Missabougou, Niamakoro, Sénou, Sogoniko, Sokorodji and Yrimadio.

## **CURRENCY**

The currency in Mali is the Franc Communauté Financière Africaine, or FCFA. It is a shared currency with other West African countries. One pound sterling corresponds to 791 FCFA.

## **FACTS ABOUT MALI**

More facts about the Republic of Mali can be found on:

The United States of America's Central Intelligence Agency website:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html#top>

The BBC website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13881370>

The World Bank website: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mali>

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### Web Sites

**American Anthropological Society:** [www.aaanet.org/commitees/ethics/ethcode.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/commitees/ethics/ethcode.htm)

**Guardian, The:** [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

**Radio Liberte:** radioliberte.com

**SOAS:** [ht//pp.mercury.soas.ac.uk/research\\_and\\_galleries/ethics/StatementonEthics.pdf](http://pp.mercury.soas.ac.uk/research_and_galleries/ethics/StatementonEthics.pdf)



**Society for Ethnomusicology:** [www.indiana.edu/ethmusic](http://www.indiana.edu/ethmusic)

**Virginia Museum of fine Arts:** Art of Mali from the Collection of the Museum.

[www.vmfa.state.us/mali](http://www.vmfa.state.us/mali)

### **Selected Discography**

All recordings here are cassettes. Compact disks are marked as CD.

**Ballo, Chaka:** Vol.4 (SD 147)

**Burama:** Untitled (no label)

**Camara, Seydu:** Kambili. Recorded by C.Bird in Mali (1968), Indiana University.

**Cherry, Don / Ed Blackwell:** El Corazon (ECM Records, ECM 1230, 1982) CD

**Diabate, Toumani & Taj Mahal:** Koulanjan (Hannibal HNCD 1444, 1999) CD

**Diakite, Baala Guimba:** Balla Cononifing (Mali K7 S.A.)

----- Mande Mori Vol.1 (Mali K7 S.A.)

----- Mande Mori Vol.2 (Mali K7 S.A.)

----- Mande Mori Vol.3 (Mali K7 S.A.)

**Diakite, Sadie:** Untitled (SD 069)

**Diakite, Sambou(ni):** Vol.1 Sidiya Mamby (SD 016)

----- Vol.2 Camili Donso (SD 034)

----- Vol.3 Histoire Simbomba (SD 035)

----- Vol.4 Histoire de Forokala Makan (SD 036)

**Diakite, Sidi:** Vol.1 (SD 156)

**Diakite, Toumani:** Histoire de Danfaga Samou et Tenin Croumba Vol.1 (no label)

----- Histoire de Danfaga Samou et Tenin Croumba Vol.2 (no label)

**Diallo, Amidou:** Vol.1 (SD 207)

**Doumbia, Yacouba:** Vol.1 (SD 154)

**Jara, Hamari:** Field recording by Judy Mahy, 26 May 1975

**Jara, Souleymane:** Field recording by Judy Mahy, March 1975

**Kamalengoni:** Kelea (Indigo) CD

**Konate, Solomane:** Diafren (Mama Productions)

----- Dankoroba Nyansa (Mama Productions)

----- Nganaw (Mama Productions)

----- Ntana (Modibo Diallo Productions)

**Kone, Abou:** Vol.4 (SD-?-)

**Kone, Toumani:** Baro (no label)

----- Vol.2 (MGS 3004)

----- Vol.3 (SD 125)

**Micus, Stephan:** Desert Poems (ECM Records, ECM 1757, 2001) CD

**Parker, William:** Long Hidden: The Olmec Series (AUM Fidelity, AUM036, 2006) CD

----- Double Sunrise Over Neptune (AUM Fidelity, AUM047, 2008) CD

**Samake, Sibiri:** Mali: Musiques des Chasseurs de Sebenikoro. (Buda)

----- Mali: Musiques des Chasseurs (Buba) CD

**Sangare, Amadou:** Histoire de Bereko Seydou Diakite (SD 116)

----- Histoire de Tobri Keita (no label)

----- Vol.10 (SD 143)

**Sangare Mamadou:** Vol.2 (SD 203)

----- Dandjourou (MD 008)

----- Histoire de Famory (MD 009)

**Sangare, Yaya:** Histoire de Waraba Tchatcho (SD 088)

**Sangare, Oumou:** Oumou (World Circuit 2003) CD

**Sidibe, Yoro:** Concert de Koulouba (MGS 6345)

----- Vol.1 (SD 082)

----- Vol.2 (SD 083)

----- Vol.3 Histoire de Yamouroudian Traore (SD 084)

----- Histoire de Amadou Ouologuem a Kourouba (SD 085)

----- Histoire de Sirakomi Donsso (SD 090)

----- Vol.1 (SD 110)

----- Concert Live (SD 132)

----- Concert a Baco Djikoroni en 1990 (SD 205)

----- Komo Foly (MD 010)

----- Vol.29 (MGS 6295)

----- Vol.30 (MGS 6296)

----- Histoire de Soungalo Konare (MSG 6297)

**Sanogo, Batoman:** Presente Tronkele (SD 003)

----- Presente Mankan Dosso (SD 004)

----- Presente Siriman Dosso (SD 005)

----- Presente Bani Gnanama (SD 006)

**Traore, Sekouba:** Vol.1, Kewale (Fakala Productions P-1999)

----- Moustapha Diallo "Same" (Fakala Productions P-2009)

----- A Histoire de Djeguiba et Lion (SD 065)

----- Vol.1 (no label)

----- Vol.1 (MSG 6248)

**Traore, Toba Seydou:** N'goni Magni (MD 013)

**Various Artists:** Mali Lolo! Stars of Mali (Smithsonian Folkways 40508) CD