

**BBC Radio 3's WORLD ROUTES**  
**TRANSCRIPT OF LOCATION FEATURE:**  
**“MALI'S SONGBIRD, OUMOU SANGARÉ”**

Broadcast on 20.09.03

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by Lucy Durán, November 2007



Oumou Sangaré (centre, in blue) in Wasulu village, 2003, while recording World Routes, with hunters' harps behind her, and woman holding calabash percussion (left). Photo: Lucy Durán

## 1. ESSAY: “Radio as research: fresh perspectives on Oumou Sangaré’s music”

This radio documentary and accompanying transcript seek to create, for both non-specialist and specialist audiences, an authoritative picture of the sonic, cultural, geographical and emotional world of Mali’s iconic female artist, Oumou Sangaré. It does so through the medium of sound, supported by complementary written word, intertwining music, interviews, and location reports recorded in 2003 in Bamako (where Sangaré was born and grew up and continues to live), and in Wasulu, the region in southern Mali where Sangaré’s parents are from, and whose regional traditions are her main inspiration. The music featured on the programme is taken primarily from a compilation double CD, *Oumou*, released in 2003, which features tracks from Sangaré’s three previous international releases *Moussoulou*, *Ko sira*, and *Worotan*, as well as some songs from cassettes released in West Africa only. There are also original unpublished field recordings made exclusively for the programme, during a trip with Sangaré to Wasulu – one of her rare visits to the region –featuring the two main regional styles that Sangaré draws on: hunters’ songs, and songs for the masquerade, *sogoninkun*.

Apart from the journey to Wasulu, which constitutes a major part of the programme’s narrative, the documentary is structured around Oumou Sangaré’s own voice, taken from an extended interview recorded by Durán in Bamako in June 2003. This interview took place over three days and lasted several hours, and is without doubt the most detailed and personal published account of Sangaré’s life and philosophy that this singer has made, providing a unique window into the life of a Malian female artist. Her words present new vistas and insights into themes that are explored in Durán’s writings on *wassoulou* (see Durán’s publications in the bibliography; to date these are the main publications on *wassoulou* music): for example, the role of *wassoulou* in opening a new space for non-griot musicians in Mali; its appropriation of sacred hunters’ music; and its use as the public voice of women’s hidden discourse. This essay and programme are intended as a contribution to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of gender, cultural politics and identity in Mali today, and of Oumou Sangaré in particular, whose use of traditional songs of advice such as *Sigi kuruni* (Music 8) have been previously misunderstood by scholars and feminists (see Maxwell 2000: 234).

As Charry states, “Because musicological writing about and from Africa lags behind other kinds of writing, key dimensions of African life that cut across disciplinary boundaries are missing in studies of Africa’s past, present and future. Questions of identity are so keenly played out in music that to neglect them impoverishes analyses” (Charry 2000: 352).

The demands, constraints and technical possibilities of the medium of radio are necessarily different from those of academic publishing. Radio has the potential to open up new perspectives on published writing through the nature of the medium itself. It is well known that *hearing* the spoken word often has a different impact, bringing out different nuances and meanings, from that of *reading* the same words from a written source (Lummis 1987; Tonkin 1992). This is why, for example, hearing the performance of speeches by great orators is different from reading words they have spoken. In this case, Sangaré’s often very candid statements about her views on polygamy and the extent to which she was influenced in her songs by her own childhood experiences of her father taking on a second wife, have an added poignancy and resonance when *heard* in her own words, especially placed next to the music she is talking about.

Going beyond straightforward ethnography, this is a multi-faceted audio representation of the artist and her music through features inherent to the medium of radio. Thus, the

programme brings to life her character: for example, through the re-enacting of Oumou Sangaré's words with a voice-over in English (voice-overs are a necessity for radio, unlike television, where subtitles can be used), and the use of music to enhance speech. Radio is Africa's most accessible medium (Fardon and Furniss 2000). While most academic publications are rarely read by the musicians about whom they concern, this programme, archived permanently on the BBC Radio 3 website, was, and still can be heard – and critiqued – by anyone with access to the internet.

At the same time, radio cannot provide the kinds of references required of academic writing. Here they are served by this essay and transcript, both of which are archived permanently on BBC Radio 3, a national public funded station with an accessible website, edited by specialists. This is a unique type of publication in the field of ethnomusicological scholarship.

### **Oumou Sangaré**

Oumou Sangaré is the best-known star and populariser of the Malian style known as *wassoulou*. A full biography, and a history of *wassoulou*, are available elsewhere (Durán 1995, 1996, 2000, 2003). For present purposes, a few broad facts are summarised here. Sangaré's parents are both from Wasulu; her mother, Aminata Diakité, used to sing at masquerades (*sogoninkun*) in the villages of Wasulu, and then continued to perform for life-cycle celebrations for the Wasulu communities in Bamako, where the family moved in 1966. Oumou, the third of their four children, was born in Bamako in 1968. Shortly afterwards the father, Sidiki Sangaré, took a second wife, and eventually left Bamako to settle in the Ivory Coast with the new wife; this evidently caused Oumou's mother such distress that she was unable to sing or even do house work for some years. Oumou was obliged to help her mother out from the age of about five years old, singing with her at "street parties" (life-cycle parties held in the street to accommodate the large numbers of guests) to earn some extra money, and gaining experience of singing in public. In her teens she was recruited to the group Djoliba Percussions, with whom she undertook her first trip outside Mali, including to the UK in 1984 (which is where I first heard her). At that time, the regional tradition from Wasulu that she represented was unknown with no international recordings, and her soaring voice and rhythmic pentatonic melodies made a considerable impact on audiences everywhere. Encouraged by her success, in 1989, she recorded her first album in Ivory Coast, but not without problems. The original producer, Ibrahim Sylla, a Senegalese based in Paris with a successful label, allegedly found it difficult to categorise her style of music, and the tapes went missing for some months. Eventually discovered and released under the title *Moussolou* (Women) in 1990, at a period of increasing civil unrest in the country and discontent with the regime of President Moussa Traoré (who was finally ousted in a coup in March 1991), *Moussolou* was an innovative representation of the music of Wasulu and became an instant hit in Mali, especially the song *Diaraby nene* or "the shivers of love", with its outspoken lyrics about female sensuality.

Although *Moussolou* was an enormous success turning Oumou into a star overnight, (the cassette sold over 100,000 copies) she was not the first to record Wasulu's music. The regional traditions of Wasulu had been gradually making an impact on Malian audiences through the recordings of a few artists from the region, such as Coumba Sidibé and Sali Sidibé (not related). Coumba was the first singer from Wasulu to become a member of Mali's Ensemble Instrumental National in 1977, and she recorded with her uncle, Alata Brulaye Sidibe, who is generally acknowledged as one of the seminal players of the *kamalengoni* (the youth harp), which Oumou Sangaré made her trademark.

There is some discussion about whether or not Alata Brulaye actually created this instrument, as he himself claimed in his only interview in 1996, shortly before he died (see

Durán 2000), and as is generally acknowledged by *kamalengoni* players as the creator of the instrument (Durán 1995). While Alata Brulaye was the first to be recorded, with an LP disc entitled *Specialiste de kamalengoni* (Maikano LP MAILPS 1024) [1983], research by Conrad and Camara reveals that there were several hunters's musicians who played the instrument before Brulaye. Furthermore, they show that the youth harp largely took over the role and repertoire of the six-string pluriarc known as *dan*, (which Brulaye himself had also played) (Conrad 2002).

Oumou Sangaré's innovations consisted of rendering the traditions from Wasulu with a semi-acoustic line-up of electric guitar, violin, *karinyan* (the iron scraper), electric bass, jembe, and *kamalengoni* as lead instrument. Many of her songs were about the subservient roles of women in arranged marriages, the problems of the jealousy between co-wives, and often difficult relations with the husband's family (see Brand 2001 for further discussion of gender ideology in Mali). These songs are largely drawn from the tradition, but given a special interpretation from Oumou's own life story.

At the time of recording the World Routes programme that this essay documents, in 2003, Sangaré was one of Mali's most successful artists both at home and abroad. She had recently released for the West African market, in local cassette format, a new album whose title track, *Yaala*, (see music 12), was the current local hit, played frequently in Mali's nightclubs and on the radio. It was her most electronic production to date. Previous publications by Durán about *wassoulou* music have emphasised the ways in which Sangaré's lyrics address the problems that women face in polygamous marriages, and her use of hunters' styles, which are considered both powerful and ancient (Durán 1995, 2000). This radio programme reveals how Sangaré's songs equally critique the behaviour of young urban women, using electronic production techniques as part of a deliberate strategy to reach Bamako's club audiences, reflecting her conviction that music has the power to educate and change the mindset of the youth (speech links 17-19).

Since 2003, Sangaré has focused her attention more on her various local businesses, including her hotel "Residence Wassulu", on the road to Bamako's airport, in which she has created an "espace culturel" where she often performs with her band on weekends, and where she has created her own studio. Her new international album, *Seya*, will be released by World Circuit in 2009.

Sangaré's interview is in itself a unique oral testimony by a female African singer. Malian women are in general not expected by society to be open about their feelings or personal histories; this goes against prevailing gender ideology (Brand, Hoffman, Grosz-Ngate). Oumou Sangaré's candid and detailed account of her childhood here is a largely unprecedented first-person account of the life of a poor migrant family living in Bamako in the 1970s and 80s. It tells how she was obliged to contribute from an early age to the family wages by singing, and she was clearly emotionally affected by her mother's obvious depression from being in a polygamous marriage. (Excerpts of the original recorded interview material are transcribed in the sleeve notes to the CD *Oumou*.) This testimony explains the passion with which she has composed certain songs such as *Magnoumako* (Music 3). It also provides insights into the way that Oumou and her family were able to maintain their sense of regional Wasulu identity, even though Oumou herself was born and grew up in Bamako. It helps to explain the central role of song in Mali amongst migrant communities living in Bamako, in communicating, educating and reinforcing cultural and regional identities. She herself acknowledges the controversial nature of her sometimes explicit song lyrics, for example in her explanation of her erotic song *Diaraby nene* (Speech link 6).

The role of women in Mali as bearers of the tradition and as innovators of popular culture, especially though the medium of music, has been largely ignored in Mande studies though this is changing with recent scholarship by De Jorio, Grosz-Ngate, Brand, Hoffman,

Durán, Maxwell, and Schulz amongst others (see bibliography). Hale reflects this in his overview of scholarship on the art of the griots, but does not mention other types of music in which women singers excel, such as *wassoulou* (Hale 1998). Charry, in his comprehensive study of Mande (Maninka and Mandinka) music, admits that

“one major area I have barely broached is differences in musical training, performance, and reception between males and females... Lucy Durán’s work with women and music sets a high standard showing the significance of this area. One result of my neglect of women and music is the noticeable lack of discussion of vocal music, a major – some might say the major – aspect of Mande music making” (Charry 2000: 345-6).

Charry does make several references to Wasulu, its musical traditions and their influence on local styles, and acknowledges the popularity of the women singers, especially in relation to the *jelimuso* (female griots, the hereditary endogamous musicians):

“the praise singing associated with jelimusolu is going to have a tough time surviving, as the surge of popularity that Wasulu female singers have been enjoying in the 1990s has demonstrated” (Charry 2000: 350).

The music known as *wassoulou* (see Durán 1995 for a description of the history of the style), is named after the Wasulu region, which straddles three political borders (Ivory Coast, Guinea, and Mali). (These two spellings are used here to distinguish between the name of the style of music *wassoulou*, which reflects French colonial orthography, since this is how it is usually represented on locally produced cassettes, as opposed to the name of the geographical region Wasulu, which is spelt here according to modern Bamana orthography; see Durán 1995. These spellings however are not followed by Maxwell, who uses the term Wassolu for both music and region, and who indeed had not read this author’s publications when she was writing her thesis; as stated in her introduction (Maxwell 2002).

Maxwell’s hitherto unpublished PhD study focuses on the recreation of regional Wasulu music in Bamako; her understanding of the overall development of this music and its sources and key artists agree with this author (Durán)’s account, and there is much important new and rich data and observation in her research. Her emphasis is on the way that singers of Wasulu draw on the concept of destiny as explanation for their musical performance in the public domain, in a country where griots dominate professional music; while this author focused on the symbolism of the *kono* (songbird) as an expression of freedom.

One of the many distinctive features of this highly rhythmic, pentatonic, youth-oriented music is that the singers describe themselves as *kônô* (songbird), a symbol of a beautiful voice, but also of freedom of expression, and of achieved rather than ascribed musical status, that is, they are not born into a griot lineage, but become musicians by choice. Wasulu’s music has enjoyed enormous popularity in Mali since the 1990s, and has engendered many local stars, who draw in various ways on several regional styles from southern Mali. This author (Durán 1995, 2000, 2003, 2006) has previously written about the adaptation and transformation by youth of the music of the ancient hunters’ societies (*donsoton*) music - probably the oldest form of music in Mali today (Charry 2000) (see music 6). As already argued by Durán, and further supported by Maxwell’s PhD thesis, this adaptation provides the main trademark sound of *wassoulou*, with its characteristic “youth harp”, the *kamalengoni* (see music 9), a smaller and higher-pitched, non-ritual version of the hunters’ harp (*donsongoni*).

In this radio programme, Sangaré, who has rarely visited Wasulu even though she



evokes its styles, language and identity in her songs, highlights the importance of the *kamalengoni* as signifier of youth culture, and as the defining marker of her personal style. Travelling through the countryside with Sangaré, talking to villagers about her music, and noting her interactions with them, suggested that her personal success and stardom has made her an important role model for women. She has also contributed to the enduring popularity of the *kamalengoni* in Wasulu, where it is now used in many different contexts, such as to accompany women's work in the fields and collecting water at the well. Indeed the *kamalengoni* has now moved beyond the world of *wassoulou* music (see speech link 13), and its playing technique has become virtuosic; some players have added up to four extra strings and the use of machine heads for tuning is now widely adopted.

Whilst the metaphor of the *kônô* (songbird) is ancient, it should not obscure the fact that some Wasulu musicians are from blacksmith families, and therefore belong to the *nyamakala* group of endogamous artisans. For example, Wasulu singers Nahawa Doumbia and Kokanko Sata Doumbia are blacksmiths, as signalled by their surname, Doumbia. The latter is one of the few women who also play the *kamelengoni*, an instrument that is otherwise only performed by males (even its name means "male-youth harp"), though in fact, Kokanko's mother is a *jeli*, a Kouyate. (Interview with Durán, Bamako, 2005).

Sangaré's own discourse around *wassoulou* music (cf Durán 1995) typically focuses on the contrasting role of the Wasulu "songbird" to that of the hereditary griots; the Wasulu "songbirds" sing for the wellbeing of the community, unlike the songs of the griots that praise individuals (see Durán 1995). This kind of discourse was especially significant during the transitional years for Mali following the military coup in 1991, which ended a 23-year military dictatorship that had favoured the griot, ushering in Mali's first democratically elected government. Maxwell also reflects this binary opposition in her analysis of the role of *wassoulou* singers (Maxwell 2003: 52; 124). Oumou claims that she wanted fellow Malians "to be able to identify with something different. And now Mali has become very rich in its music, whereas before, it was only one voice, the voice of the griots, that could be heard. If you wanted something different, you were obliged to listen to foreign music. I think I changed that." (interview with author, Bamako, June 2003).

Oumou Sangaré's success as a very young, unmarried female singer working in a non-*jeli* regional idiom was unprecedented, and opened the door for other non-*jeli* artistes under the new democracy, which many Malians saw as a breath of fresh air.

What developments have there been since this programme was broadcast? For one, Sangaré has collaborated with some well-known American female artists. In November 2006, she performed live with the jazz singer songwriter Alicia Keys, the latter's song *Falling In and Out of Love* (see [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xq234\\_in-and-out-alicia-keys-oumou-sangar\\_dating](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xq234_in-and-out-alicia-keys-oumou-sangar_dating)) She also recorded with jazz singer Dee Dee Bridgewater on the latter's 2007 album *Red Earth*. It must also be said that since this programme was broadcast, *wassoulou*'s popularity has declined somewhat, and no other artist has significantly challenged Sangaré's place as its top star. The music of *jelimusow* (female griots) continues to dominate the local scene in Bamako, partly because it has a regular context for performance, the life-cycle ceremonies, while *wassoulou* music does not.

### **Radio as a medium of research, & World Routes**

The potential of radio and other audio media (such as locally published cassettes) as a source of study is increasingly recognised by the scholarly community (Fardon and Furniss 2000; Conrad 2002). It is a well-known fact that radio has long been, and still remains a major form of communication in Africa; even with the rise of other forms of media, such as television and internet, "the growth in African broadcast culture on radio has been spectacular by whatever quantitative or qualitative criteria we choose to measure it. Via radio, African

cultures are broadcast, both widely and narrowly, and influenced by the broadcasts of other cultures” (Fardon and Furniss 2000: 1). Radio is still one of the most important means of disseminating music in Mali, and Malian musicians are well aware of its potential to reach rural audiences in particular. It was initially through radio that Oumou Sangaré’s first cassette, *Moussolou*, became massively popular back in 1991, the first time that *wassoulou* music had attracted mass attention beyond the region itself. The ethnomusicologist Heather Maxwell, who spent time in Mali in the early 1990s as a Peace Corps volunteer, comments on this: “I recall the impact of Oumou’s *Moussolou* album... living in a rural village called N’Tossoni in southeastern Mali. Since there was no electricity in this village battery operated radio and cassette players were our only connection to the capital city and the outside world. People of all ages, especially men, carried their radios wherever they went...in the beginning of 1990, a new singer called Oumou Sangaré suddenly seized the national airwaves and flooded the music cassette market that came into the village every Friday. From that point on until 1991 when my term of service was over in this village, Oumou Sangaré’s cassette *Moussolou* had become a household item and her songs... were played so often that I had memorized the songs and melodies along with my friends and neighbours” (Maxwell 2002: 221).

This radio documentary feature was recorded in Mali for BBC Radio 3’s *World Routes*, a weekly one-hour programme presented by Lucy Durán since it was launched in September 2000. Radio 3 is a UK national, public funded radio devoted primarily to western classical music and jazz. *World Routes* is the only show on the network that is dedicated exclusively to traditional and non-Western music with many programmes recorded on location. It has a high national profile, with an average of 100,000 thousand listeners (not including the large number of listeners from around the world who access the programmes online), according to the BBC Radio 3 RAJAR Briefing Summary, (RAJAR, October 2007 – Marketing Communications and Audiences). For the location features, a team including Lucy Durán as presenter and senior producer James Parkin (an Oxford University Graduate in History and Organ scholar at Balliol College) record in different parts of the world. These programmes are put together and vetted by Radio 3’s production team in conjunction with specialists, and are archived permanently on the Radio 3 website, with a photo gallery, a list of music played, and now for the first time, an annotated transcript.

Durán has known and worked with Sangaré since she first appeared in Djoliba Percussions in the mid 1980s (see speech link 5), and the nature of this extended interview reflects their long-standing relationship of mutual trust. The programme is more than just a report recorded on location; it represents important editorial choices and skills, much like those of putting together a book. For example one of the challenges in broadcasting a non-English language interview is how best to represent that voice in English, in order to represent faithfully the spirit of the original voice. Wherever possible, an appropriate “voice-over” from the culture should be chosen. In the case of Oumou Sangaré, it was important to find a young West African francophone woman who would have some knowledge of Malian music, for the voice-overs. Chelima Fade is a young woman of Malian-Spanish descent, living in the UK, who is involved in arts administration and is married to a well-known Senegalese kora player, Seckou Keita. She is not a professional actress, but her special empathy for Oumou Sangaré’s music and her knowledge of the cultural environment give her readings a certain authenticity.

Some have claimed that Sangaré’s music is not original, which undermines its impact on Malian audiences. Maxwell says “the rejection [in Mali] of Oumou’s internationally acquired reputation as a feminist is based on the fact that her songs are recognized by almost all of her listeners as modernized versions of other people’s or cultural groups’ repertoire: namely love songs or wedding songs.” (Maxwell 2003: 228). Yet this process of taking songs from the tradition and reworking them is not specific to Sangaré but is certainly a general trend amongst all Malian artists. Sangaré remarks: “All my songs I compose myself. Or sometimes I

take them from the tradition, but I modernise them, I write my own words, I arrange them, I bring them up to date, I talk about things that are happening now. This is what happens in African music. We take from the old traditions and we interpret. But we, the singers of *wassoulou*, we compose far more than the griots do, we invent rhythms, we talk about the reality of today. Once or twice I've had problems with this, like for instance with Bi Furu, I was touring and a woman came up to me and said it was her song, but I had already registered it with the composers' society here and it really was my own composition. Another time, I sang a hunters' song, for which the hunters' musician Toumani Kone was very famous, *Mogo te diya be ye* (you can't please everyone). But Toumani himself was interviewed on television, and he declared that he had found the song in the tradition, so it wasn't his either, and I was perfectly justified in singing it!

"I have always listened to hunters music, on radio and cassette. I have never had any problems with the hunters about using their style. Once I went to Gambia with a group of 36 hunters, we were invited by the Gambian president Yaya Jammeh, he sent a plane to pick us up, there were 42 of us altogether, and we got on so well. I sang their songs in front of them, and they stood up to congratulate me! There is no problem between me and hunters." (interview with Durán, Bamako, 2003).

Here follows a transcript of the programme, with all speech written out word for word, and music listed, and with additional notes on both, including a full line-by-line transcription of the song text to one of Sangaré's songs. These speech "links" (a radio term to describe speech that "links" together pieces of music were mostly spontaneous. Durán's links for example were done entirely on location over a period of ten days. Some repetition was inevitable, as was some simplification. It is hoped that this essay, together with the notes below, will add greater depth to her spoken portrayal of Oumou Sangaré and *wassoulou* music, as will the music itself, and the unique opportunity to be with Sangaré in the region she evokes in her songs.

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## 2. ANNOTATED TRANSCRIPT OF PROGRAMME

### PROGRAMME CREDITS

Researched and presented on location by **Lucy Durán**

Recorded **on location** in Bamako and Wasulu, Mali, in June & September, 2003

All field recordings by **James Parkin**

Interview with Oumou Sangaré conducted and recorded by **Lucy Durán**

English translations of Oumou's interviews done by Lucy Durán and read by: **Chelima Fade**

**Musicians:** Various musicians recorded on location in Wasulu, plus: selected songs from Oumou Sangaré's published recordings

**BBC Radio 3 Senior Producer:** James Parkin (editor and compiler of the programme)

### *A NOTE ON THE FORMAT OF THIS TRANSCRIPT:*

*All speech is in italics and is transcribed directly from the programme*

*Notes on the songs and speech are in Roman script, and are indented*

*Numbers indicate the time into the programme, from 00-58 minutes (the full length of the broadcast)*

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## 00 SPEECH LINK 1

LUCY, on location – by the Niger

*“I’m in Mali, West Africa, and it’s very wet. This usually dry, barren, and hot country has been transformed into a lush, tropical garden. A huge storm is here, and I’m standing at the banks of the Niger river, which in the last few minutes has been transformed from a placid flow into a raging sea.*

*It’s September, the middle of the rainy season. And I’ve come here to Mali – famous for its music – to celebrate one of the African continent’s most iconic singers. She’s in her early 30s and she’s an important voice for women’s rights in West Africa. Her new album is out next week...*

[**Music 1** gradually up under Lucy’s voice]

*... she’s known as the ‘Songbird’ of Wasulu, Mali’s most remote southern region. She is Oumou Sangaré.”*

## 00.54 MUSIC 1

**Maladon** (Hospitality)

Perf and Comp: Oumou Sangaré

Track 1 from CD 2, *Oumou* World Circuit Records WLWCD067

**Note:** Whilst Sangaré is a harsh critic of some traditional Malian values, she is anxious to show that she upholds others, such as hospitality.

(This and subsequent quotes from Sangaré in this transcript about the meanings of her songs are mostly taken from parts of the same interview that were not however included in the radio broadcast, for lack of time; some of this material is featured in the sleeve notes to her album *Oumou*.)

“Africa is very poor, but very rich at the same time, because we have customs here like extreme hospitality. It’s true there are customs that are bad here, but there are many that are really good, and this is one of them...

I composed this because I was alarmed to see that some African countries are throwing out entire expatriate communities, like in Cote d’Ivoire. I was so incensed by this, I had to write the song. This is the kind of behaviour I have come to expect from Europe, it doesn’t shock me because it’s another culture, another world. But when one African chases another out of his country, it pains my heart because it never used to be like that. So in this song I remind people that the tradition of hospitality is our identity.

The chorus says ‘If you welcome people and give them hospitality, this will only strengthen your good reputation. Even if those to whom you have given hospitality do not acknowledge it, God in heaven will.’

... I want to encourage and comfort those people, to make sure we don’t lose this precious tradition of hospitality. Here in Africa, if you tell someone that God will repay them, this means so much to them!

This is why I put the national hymn in the song when I perform it, though it’s not in the recording on the album. Because hospitality is Malian! A Malian will humble himself with a guest, and the guest is the most important thing. My own mother would make us sleep on the floor when we had visitors, and they would sleep on the bed. If there wasn’t enough to eat, she would say to the children, you’ll wait for your next meal till lunch, the visitors will eat first. That was our education. It’s a beautiful tradition, it’s an African philosophy.”

## 2.28 SPEECH LINK 2

LUCY in a taxi in Bamako; traffic noise

*“Well the rain’s eased up and I’m in a taxi driving across Bamako to the house of Oumou Sangaré. She was born here in the capital of Mali. It’s a lively, sprawling city along the banks of the river Niger. Her mother was a singer, and she moved to Bamako from a small village in Wasulu, a remote corner of West Africa that few people visit, but that holds some of the most powerful and rarely heard musical traditions. But when Oumou was just 21 years old she became a star, with her groundbreaking album Moussolou, which means ‘Women’. Oumou’s music was completely different from anything else heard before in Mali. Not only because it challenges the musical traditions of the griots, who are the caste of praise singers, but also because it addresses some of the difficult and sensitive women’s issues in this largely male-dominated society.*

*In today’s programme Oumou takes me on a rare journey to Wasulu, and to the roots of her music. We’ll hear the masked dances, and the sacred music of the hunters. We’ll also be hearing extracts from her new album Oumou. And she explains to me the personal significance of her songs.”*

## 3.53 MUSIC 2 (Field recording, on location for the programme)

### Mogo bee ni diyanamogo (everyone has someone they love)

**Note:** This brief excerpt of a traditional Wasulu youth song features Oumou Sangaré with a chorus of women at a well (plus clapping). This song was a spontaneous response to Oumou stopping at a well by the side of the main dirt road to Yanfolila, to point out to us the burden of work for women in the countryside. It is typical of a genre and style of songs from Wasulu for unmarried youth, with a solo-chorus structure. The recording is very brief, because the song itself only lasted a couple of minutes, and by the time the recording equipment was ready, the song was almost over. Nevertheless it gives a glimpse of Sangaré’s knowledge of village songs, despite the fact that she was born and raised in Bamako.

## 4.22 SPEECH LINK 3

OUMOU: (Voice over, English translation):

*“I found music through my mother’s side of the family. My grandmother was a great singer from Wasulu. She sang at baptisms and weddings and was really famous - sometimes a wedding could be cancelled if she couldn’t make it!*

*My mother used to sing, but she wasn’t like her mother. She had so many problems... When I was just two, my father took a second wife, and they left for the Ivory Coast, leaving my mother alone here in Mali.*

*Life for my mother was very tough and very sad. People used to beg her to sing at their wedding parties, but she wouldn’t. She was too depressed, and had too many problems supporting and taking care of us. But sometimes if she accepted the invitation to sing, she would take me along. From the age of 5, I was singing with her. I followed her everywhere, and that’s how I started singing. As I started earning money from my singing, my only motivation was to help my mother. That was what pushed me into music more than anything else...*

*It was the way that my father behaved with my mother that has made me denounce polygamy.*

*If a man takes more than one wife, the women are never happy and the children are even unhappier.”*

### 5.54 MUSIC 3

**Magnoumako** (agony)

Perf and Comp: Oumou Sangaré

Track 4 from CD 1, *Oumou*, World Circuit Records WLWCD067

**Note:** this song reveals the extent to which Sangaré was affected by her parents' separation caused by her father marrying a second wife, evidently against her mother's wishes. Soon afterwards, the father and second wife emigrated to the Cote d'Ivoire. Oumou did not see her father again until she was in her 30s, when she sent him a ticket to visit her in Bamako. The song paints a fairly bleak picture of women's existence in Mali; this kind of outspoken criticism goes against the expected code of behaviour for Malian women (see Brand 2002, and Hoffman 2002), and has somewhat controversially been interpreted by some as a feminist stance (see for example Maxwell 2003: 228); see also below, speech link 19. In keeping with this, the arrangement of this song features some non-traditional elements, such as harmonies in the chorus.

The chorus says: *“The agony that women endure, there's nothing comparable; Oh the agony of women, how mothers suffer! The way my own mother suffered, I've never seen anything like it.”*

Oumou commented in parts of her interview (see note to music 1) with relation to this song that

“Women pass their entire lives suffering, they become pregnant in suffering, give birth in suffering, the child crawls in suffering, the mother suffers the upbringing of the child all on her own, then when the child turns into a well-brought up adult, the mother is told to stay out of the child's affairs, not to interfere with his marriage, any money he earns goes straight to the father not the mother, if she wants even a penny of this money, she has to beg her husband for it. Yet she has done everything for this child, but all the rewards and honour go to the father and she has to sit quietly to one side.

My mother was all on her own, struggling to make ends meet, to bring us up well. Her tears were always running. There were six of us in one room.

Sometimes at night she would look at us, and she'd begin to weep, because she had no means to feed us the next day...

Then after I married, I had better insight into the institution [of marriage].

That's when I composed *Bi furu* (marriage today), in fact that's the title of my second album here in Mali (in Europe it was on the album called *Ko sira*). It was a big hit here because I explained exactly what happens when a young girl gets married, from the time of her betrothal, through to the wedding, her problems with the parents in law, how she has to marry a much older man, who already has wives... I told the story as it really is and people were astonished to hear the truth.”

### 7.44 SPEECH LINK 4

OUMOU: (over music 3)

*“I wrote this song about my mother. It’s about extreme suffering or agony. It’s about how she wept, how she was marginalised by society, how she was ignored, how she struggled. I address the song to all women, I say, you endure the pain, but hold on with both hands, because one day, things will become clear. My mother cannot listen to this song. If it’s playing on the radio she says, OK turn it off now!! That’s enough!!!”*

**MUSIC 3** back up till end of song.

## 9.10 MUSIC 4

**Diaraby Nene** (the shivers of love)

Perf and Comp: Oumou Sangaré, from CD *Moussolou*

World Circuit Records WCD 021 (1991)

*Note:* This song, originally released on her first cassette *Moussolou*, in 1990, was Sangaré’s first big hit. It talks quite explicitly about female sexuality and desire from the female perspective, which goes against the dominant gender ideology in Mali, in which women are presumed to be submissive. At the time this was unprecedented in the public domain, and to a certain extent, remains unique within the realm of Malian music based on regional traditions. This was all the more poignant because when Oumou sang the song, she was only 21, and still unmarried.

To what extent was this kind of song lyric possible because of Sangaré having to be the family breadwinner from an early age, evident from conversations with both her and her family? In the following extract from her interview, Sangaré comments on her early professional career. Part of the original interview (not broadcast) talks about the surprise and apparent incomprehension of her music on the part of the Paris-based producer, Ibrahima Sylla making him unwilling to release the album; in fact, he even lost the masters (which had been recorded in Abidjan in 1989 and produced by Boncana Maiga) for some months.

In her PhD thesis about Wasulu singers living in Bamako, Maxwell comments at some length on the view that none of Sangaré’s songs were original material, in fact, she claims that they were all traditional and that most of them had already been recorded prior to the release of the cassette *Moussolou*. This includes *Diaraby nene*, a “version” of which had already been recorded by Bintou Sidibe (entitled merely *Nene*). The subject of copyright, and what constitutes a “version”, is however, problematic in the world of Mande music, and not as straightforward as Maxwell suggests. Many well-known Malian artists draw heavily on traditional repertoires; it is generally recognised that the originality lies in their musical arrangement, choruses, and performance style, all of which in this case are unique to Sangaré. As evidence of this, *Diaraby nene* remains Sangaré’s most requested piece, which she leaves for the end of a concert, - often coming back on stage in a new costume, something more youthful and revealing than her usual traditional *boubou* and head scarf. It continues to have a notable impact on Malian audiences, both male and female.

In comparison with all other Mande songs in traditional style, the lyrics are very explicit, revolving around the metaphor of “cold” :

*“Ah baby, I’ll see you in the morning. Wait for me, my loved one.*

*Don't think too much; mmm, the shivers of passion. My very own fathers, you can disapprove of me; I'm asking your forgiveness, you the griots of Mali. I put my hands behind my back [a gesture of humility]. When I sing of cold, I am not singing of rains or the winter, I am talking of the shivers of love. Don't you know, they're not easy! Life is pleasure. Mmm, the shivers of love. I got up, went to knock on the door (each to his own destiny!). He opened the door; no need for words. I put my leg on his leg, Allah! and his leg is cold; my hand is on his arm, his skin is cold, my love's arm. I put my hand on his chest, oh God, my love's chest, and it's cold. I put my hand low on his stomach, my skin shivers, on my love's abdomen. Mmm, the shivers of love! Don't think too much about things, Life has many pleasures but they're not all the same. Ah baby, see you in the morning..."*

## **9.20 SPEECH LINK 5 (over music 4)**

OUMOU:

*"Until I was 16, I just sang for street parties{sumuw} and I made good money doing it. I then started singing for a group called Djoliba Percussions, led by the jembe player Bamba Dambele. He wanted to experiment with singers other than the traditional griots. My role was to bring the wassoulou sound to the group. Until then most Malian groups based their music on the griot sounds.*

*After touring Europe with the group I was encouraged to go solo, and in 1987 formed my own band based on the traditional sound of wassoulou using instruments such as the kamelengoni harp, as well as western instruments such as the bass, electric guitar and violin.*

*At first I didn't want to record an album, but eventually agreed when the distributor offered me a Peugeot 505. At the time I didn't even have a bicycle, let alone a car!*

*Eventually the album was brought out in Paris by one of Europe's biggest African music producers. It was a hit. And the date was January 4, 1990. It's the only date of any importance to me. I can never forget this date because it changed everything. I couldn't believe it.*

*People couldn't believe my music. They would say 'what she sings about is heavy!! She's denouncing polygamy, she's encouraging women to stand up to their husbands, she's got guts!' The music and the song texts were strange and new for Malians, and that's why it was so successful. It was a kind of music revolution. Every household in Bamako had a copy! And my mother was so happy, that she cried!"*

**Music 4** back up, hold under voice:

## **12.00 SPEECH LINK 6**

OUMOU:

*"I wrote this song, The Shivers of Love, when I was only about fifteen. I didn't sing it in public; it was my private song for when I first fell in love. When it eventually came out it had a big impact. I sing openly of passion, of the sweetness of touching the body, how I put my hand on his chest, on his upper thigh, and I feel the shivers of passion. Nothing like this had ever been sung before, they might sing of love but never of lust. I had to ask for the forgiveness of my elders because of this song. In this culture, you never, never speak about love in front of them... but it wasn't my fault, it was - the shivers of love!"*

**Music 4** back up

## 14.23 MUSIC 5

### Choukelefoli

Perf and Comp: Amadou Sangaré

Band 1 side 1 from cassette *Amadou Sangaré volume 11*

Siriman Diallo Production and Distribution

**Note:** this music was being played from cassette on the minibus that was taking a group of us down to Wasulu: Sangaré and her entourage – including her mother - plus Durán and Radio 3 producer Parkin. Oumou had purchased this cassette at the roadside, as she liked this particular hunters' musician, Amadu Sangaré. His cassettes include hunters' epic tales, which concern the prowess of brave hunters against animals who are often genies in disguise (see Johnson, Hale and Belcher 1997; Cashion 1984; Bird 1972a; Coulibaly 1985, Samake 1999; Thoyer-Rozat 1978, 1995). The market for hunters' cassettes has proliferated since the late 1980s, and hunters' culture was privileged by the former President Alpha ba Konare (1991-2002), with two international festivals (Ministere de la culture 2003).

## SPEECH LINK 7

LUCY on bus, over music from cassette:

*"This is the music of the hunters of Wasulu, playing on a cassette on a minibus, and we're on a very narrow and bumpy dirt road, driving due south of Bamako, the capital, towards the Ivory Coast. We're going into the remote region of southern Mali which is called Wasulu, and it's famous for its hunters' music, and its masquerades. And these are the traditions that most inspire the music of Oumou Sangaré, and she's here with us on this bus. The countryside is really beautiful because it's been raining so hard. So we're driving past rice fields – bright green rice fields, and herds of cows, through villages with round, mud-brick huts, with their pointed, thatched roofs, past women who are bringing water up at the wells, with heavy loads on their heads and babies tied to their backs; young boys driving along these bright red dirt roads on their donkey carts... although it's very beautiful, this region, very few visitors come here – in fact, most people emigrate from here. It's a self-sufficient economy, very much hand-to-mouth. Oumou's parents were born here in Wasulu, but she herself was born in Bamako, and she hasn't been back here very many times. So for me, this is a voyage of discovery. But for her, it's a kind of musical pilgrimage, back to her roots."*

## 16.20 SPEECH LINK 8

OUMOU:

*"It's hard to believe, but during all this I had still barely set foot in Wasulu. I was born and raised in Bamako and I had only once been to Wasulu when I was 8 years old. My mother brought me here during the school holiday for a whole month. I didn't go again until after my first album came out, when I was invited to do a concert in Yanfolila. But it's incredible!!! Absolutely everybody's convinced that I'm a true Wasulunke, because I sing the language in my songs. I learnt to speak such good Wasulunka at home in Bamako with my mother that some people actually think I've only recently moved to Bamako. As a child, when I walked into my home in Bamako and shut the door, I was shutting the door on Bamako and it was like being in Wasulu."*



## 17.22 SPEECH LINK 9

LUCY in the countryside of Wasulu:

*“Here in Mali there’s an ancient culture of hunters’ societies – you have to be initiated into them. And very few are allowed to be part of that society. They’re not people who just go out into the bush and kill wild animals, they’re philosophers, they’re healers, they’re diviners, and they’re highly respected throughout this country. But the place where they’re strongest – where the culture of hunters is strongest – is here in Wasulu – in this densely wooded region of southern Mali. And we’ve come in search of hunters’ music – music of the big harp and iron scraper - music which is supposed to have magical power – which is supposed to charm the wild animals and protect the people of the villages. Music that probably goes back hundreds and hundreds of years. It’s certainly one of the oldest forms of music here in Mali, and it’s also the music that Oumou Sangaré loves and cherishes and draws on so much! So here we are in Wasulu. We’ve been driving along this bright red dirt road through very remote countryside, and in the rainy season it’s incredibly lush, the colours are bright green... We’ve stopped here at this village, - not far from the border with Guinea - which is renowned for its hunters’ music. There, underneath a tree, are a group of hunters in a circle with their muskets pointing upwards, and their brown tunics which is the costume of the hunters which they always wear, which is spun from local cotton, dyed in the mud of the river – so characteristic, and all strung with all kinds of amulets and mirrors and hooves of animals... all things to protect them when they’re in the bush. And we’re going over to join the hunters with Oumou Sangaré. And we hope that they’ll play for us.”*

## 19.27 MUSIC 6

**Mankan Ba** (big noise)

Field recording on location for the programme (with sound of gunpowder from shotguns)

Perf: Amara Sangaré (from Doussoudiana, Wasulu (see photo gallery) on *donsongoni* (hunters’ 6-string harp) and main vocals, with his apprentices, Karimu Sidibe (*karinyan* scraper) and Modibo Sidibe (second *donsongoni*).

**Note:** Amara Sangaré is a hunters’ musician who is not however an initiated hunter himself. This is not a much-reported phenomenon; most hunters’ musicians are also initiated hunters (see Cashion 1984). Nevertheless he is in demand as a valued performer by hunters for both ritual (*nyanfe*) and entertainment (*nyenaje*) music. He is not a professional, and has not recorded any studio cassettes, and his sphere of performance is Wasulu only, where he travels long distances by bicycle with his *donsongoni* strapped to his back, especially during just before the rainy season which is an active moment for hunters’ societies. In between such performances, he is a farmer.

*Mankan ba* was done for entertainment purposes for Oumou Sangaré, in a village in Wasulu, and only includes a chorus, not the full narrative. The meaning of this chorus (as explained by Amara Sangaré informally at the time), *Mankan ba, mankan ba dia le ye mankan ye* – is “Big noise, the sweetness of big noise is noise - the noise is of the guns and the animals in the bush”. In his version, he sings “Keep moving/walking; the great hunter is going to end up killing all the animals!” and then sings about the lion (symbol of power) who has come to greet Oumou Sangaré, Lucy Durán, and their friends.

This song *Mankan ba* is well known in the hunters’ repertoire, According to

Maxwell, the singer Doussouba Traore, originally from Ganadougou, now living in Bamako, who is one of the new generation of non-jeli artistes, sang a version of this song at a wedding party in Bamako. Maxwell comments that *Mankan ba* means “‘the world is noise’ and, in its most general, metaphorical sense, ‘life’ or ‘where there is life, there is noise’.” (Maxwell 2003: 255).

## 22.20 SPEECH LINK 9

*LUCY (on location in the village):*

*“Oumou Sangaré, what does the hunters’ music mean to you, why is it so important to you in your music?”*

*OUMOU:*

*“Hunters’ music is a great source of inspiration, and part of a very old tradition. It’s extremely important for my music!”*

*LUCY:*

*“Is it the sound? Is it the actual music? Or is it what they’re singing about? What is it that you love so much?”*

*OUMOU:*

*“The music is great, but I really love the words. They encourage young hunters to be brave men. The hunters fulfil so many important roles in these small villages, and this is all reflected in their music. They protect the people from evil spirits. In the event of war, they act like an army. They heal people, using plants. And through their song, they educate people. I’ve known their music since I was a small child, and it reminds me of being a kid, and of the work my mother used to do. We have enormous respect for the hunters, If you contradict one, he can kill. Even the chief of the village cannot stand up to them. But don’t get me wrong – they are no drunkards who will kill anyone. They respect tradition, and are very organised. Before the white people came, everything was well organised by the hunters. The hunters are fighters and sorcerers, but in the best possible way. And above all, they are the bravest men you could find.”*

## 24.03 MUSIC 7

**Donso tulon wilile** (the hunters’ party has started)

Field recording on location for the programme

Perf: Amara Sangaré and musicians (as for Music 6).

## 26.14 SPEECH LINK 10

*LUCY on location in village:*

*“This is a small village in Wasulu, and I’ve gone into a compound, a series of mud huts inside an enclosure where an extended family live. Three women are taking turns pounding grain with a heavy wooden pestle, which they throw up into the air and then they clap. This is just one of an endless round of gruelling daily chores that women in these villages have to do. Oumou sings about the hard life that these women live, and also about other cultural and religious issues that affect them. One of the most common themes in Oumou’s songs is polygamy. And right now – controversially – she’s preparing a song against female excision. It’s the women in these remote villages that Oumou writes her songs for.”*

## 27.00 MUSIC 8

## Sigi Kuruni

Perf and Comp: Oumou Sangaré

Originally from CD *Ko Sira*; released in Mali on the cassette *Bi furu*.

World Circuit Records WLWCD

Note: This is one of Oumou Sangaré's most controversial songs, because the lyrics appear to advocate the opposite of what she claims to be singing about. It comes from the traditional Wasulu repertoire of pre-nuptial wedding songs performed by the bride-to-be's mother to her daughter, to remind her of her duties as a wife. Because of the controversy surrounding this song, the full text and English translation are given here.

The instruments on this version are: *kamalengoni*, *jembe*, *karinyan*, electric solo and bass guitar, and western violin.

*Sigi kuruni* means "the little wedding stool (sigi = to sit, to be settled; kuruni = stool)". It symbolizes the settling of the wife in her husband's home.

*Cè lasigi* means to be settled in your husband's family home; the bride leaves her own home after the religious wedding, and moves in to wherever her husband's family live. A period of trial then follows, to test the endurance and mettle of the new wife. For example, she is always supposed to leave some leftovers after cooking, in case a visitor arrives unexpectedly. Often this means that she herself does not eat much or anything.. The brothers-in-law can ask for whatever they like, and she has to oblige politely.

### Chorus

**Duniya musolu-yo, nin ye cè lasigi kuruni ye, sigi kuruni**

Women of the world – this is the little marriage stool

**Ye kuruni ye, nin ye cè la sigi kuruni ye, sigi kuruni**

Little stool, this is the little marriage stool

**Aw ma lali kan mè**

Don't you hear the song of advice

**aw ma cè lasigi ladili mè, sigi yòrò kelen**

don't you hear this advice about moving to the husband's home, "sitting-in-one-place" (sigi yoro kilin = stay calmly in one place, in the house of your husband, because you're married)

**Solo** by Oumou Sangaré (each line is followed by chorus: **sigi kuruni**)

**ne kan bè musolu ma (sigi kuruni)**

I am singing for women

**furu kè man'i wèlè**

**(chorus)**

If your husband calls you

**i boli ka t'o lamè**

run to hear what he wants

**kana wo surunu**

don't belittle him (don't suck your teeth in disgust at him)

**o ma degi dogoya la**

he's not used to being disrespected

**jòn bèè ni dakan**

everyone has their fate in life

**mm, ne kan bè musolu ma**

this song is for women

**i buran muso man'i neni**

if your sister in law insults you

**I cè woloba man'i neni**

If your mother in law insults you

**I kan'o neni, ee, Alla**

Don't insult them back, by God

**kana o dogoya**

don't put them down

**o ma degi dogoya la**

they have not accustomed to being disrespected

**o k'i woloba bèrè dò ye**

treat her like your very own mother

**jon bèè ni nyesigi**

each person prepares his own future

**ko ne kan bè musolu ma**

I am singing for women

**i nimògòni o man'i bugò**

if your younger brother in law beats you

**I kan'o jati, Alla**

Don't place any importance on it, by God

**Kana o dogoya**

Don't disrespect him

**o man degi dogoya la**

he is not used to being disrespected

**o k'i furu kè bèrè dò ye**

treat him like your very own husband

**jon bèè n'i dakan**

to each his destiny

**mm, ne kan bè musolu ma**

I am singing for women

**i sinamuso man'i bugò**

if your co-wife beats you

**I kan'o jati, Alla,**

Don't think anything of it, by God

**Ale nin Alla to sa**

(leave her alone for heaven's sake...?)

**Ko ne kan bè musolu ma**

I am singing for women

**i burankè man'i wèlè**

if your older brother-in-law calls you

**I boli ka t'o lamè**

You better run to hear what he wants

**Kan'o surunu**

Don't suck your teeth in disgust

**O ma degi dogoya la**

He's not used to being disrespected

**Jòn bèè ni dakan**

Everyone has their destiny in life

**Balima musoluyo, n'a ye furu bonya,**

**ni muso min ye furu bonya a ka furu bato dèn bè barika**

My sisters, if you respect marriage, the woman who respects marriage, the child of that marriage will be blessed

**Ko balima musolu yo, n'aye furu bonya, Alla,**

**muso min ye furu bato a ka furu bonya dèn te tola, ko.**

My sisters, if you respect marriage, by God, the woman who respects marriage will not be childless

*Instrumental interlude*

*(singing becomes heightened, dynamic, and follows speech rhythm here)*

**Ee musolu! M'balima musolu! Mm aye Oumou lamè, Alla**

Oh women! My sisters! Mm, listen to oumou, by God

**A dògòni mana na, e cè dògòni mana na:**

when the younger brother turns up, your husband's younger brother

(plaintive voice)

**"cherie – the ni to tè yen? Cherie, kini ni to tè yen wa? Ne ko, café ni to tè yen?**

Darling, is there any tea left? Any rice left? I say, is there any coffee left?

**E ni nya kumuba bò yi la pratatata, ka dajukòròkuma to la brutututu, nin tè mògò diya mògò**

If you say rough words to him, this will not please people  
**Mangoya, mangoya**  
Displeasure, displeasure

*(returns to the original verse, slightly modified in terms of lyrics, but same music)*

**ne kan bè musolu ma (chorus: ni kuruni)**

I am singing for women

**i furu kè man'i wèlè (chorus)**

If your husband calls you

**i boli ka t'o lamè**

run to hear what he wants

**kana o surunu**

don't belittle him (don't suck your teeth in disgust at him)

**o ma degi dogoya la**

he's not used to being disrespected

**jòn bèè ni dakan**

everyone has their fate in life

**mm, ne kan bè musolu ma**

this song is for women

**i sinamuso man'i bugò**

if your sister in law insults you

**I kan'o jati a la**

**I cè woloba man'i neni**

If your mother in law insults you

**I kan'o neni, ee, Alla**

Don't insult them back, by God

**kana o dogoya**

don't put them down

**o ma degi dogoya la**

they have not accustomed to being disrespected

**o k'i woloba bèrè dò ye**

treat her like your very own mother

**jon bèè ni nyesigi**

each person prepares his own future

**ko ne kan bè musolu ma**

I am singing for women

**i nimògòni o man'i bugò**

if your younger brother in law beats you

**I kan'o jati, Alla**

Don't place any importance on it, by God

**Kana o dogoya**

Don't disrespect him

**o man dege dogoya la**

he is not used to being disrespected

**o k'i furu kè bèrè dò ye**

treat him like your very own husband

**jon bèè n'i dakan**

to each his destiny

**mm, ne kan bè musolu ma**

I am singing for women

**i sinamuso man'i bugò**

if your co-wife beats you

**I kan'o jati, Alla,**

Don't think anything of it, by God

**Ale nin Alla to sa**

leave her alone for God's sake!

**Ko ne kan bè musolu ma**

I am singing for women

**i burankè man'i wèlè**

if your older brother-in-law calls you

**I boli ka t'o lamè**

You better run to hear what he wants

**Kan'o surunu**

Don't suck your teeth in disgust

**O ma degi dogoya la**

He's not used to being disrespected

**Jòn bèè ni dakan**

Everyone has his destiny in life

**i cewoluba man'i nene**

if your brothers in law insult you

**I boli ka t'o lamè**

**Kan'o suruntu**

**O ma dege dogoya la**

**kan'i dogoya**

don't disrespect them

**i kan'i wo nene, kan'i dogoya**

don't insult them, don't put them down

Music 8 fade under voice:

**29.00 SPEECH LINK 11**

OUMOU

*"In Wasulu, the village women are still are ruled by men, they still do all the hard work, and they still have to accept co-wives. The sad thing is that whilst they would prefer not to have co-wives, they need help with the work. They have to cultivate the fields, they have to pound the grain, they're the first to get up and the last to go to bed, they cook and take care of the children. They collect the firewood in the bush, and wash the clothes and clean, they bring the water from the well, and all this with a baby on their back. And what do the men do? A few work in the fields; others stay under the big tree and smoke a pipe. If there were machines to help women pound grain or cultivate, then all the women of the world, even in the bush, would rather not have to share their husbands with another wife. Because in the end, these wives are no more than slaves to their husbands. ..*

*This traditional song - 'the little marriage stool' - is sung by elderly women to advise young girls about how they must behave in order to be an exemplary woman, especially by being obedient to their husbands and their in-laws.*

*When this song came out, it was often misunderstood. Some accused me of being contradictory. For me, there are some aspects of our culture that I want to keep, and others that I think should change. In the traditional version of this song, we're told that if our brothers-in-law want to beat us, we must accept it with humility. This must change."*

(Music 8 back up until end of song)

31.21 VILLAGE SOUNDS (CROSS-FADE WITH END OF SONG, and into

**MUSIC 9**

**Sabou** (field recording by Radio 3 on location)

Perf: Bouba Diakite - Kamalengoni group performing for Oumou and friends in Yanfolila

**33.40 SPEECH LINK 12**

LUCY in Yanfolila at the hunters' event; over sounds of crowd:

*"Well here we are in Yanfolila in the capital of Wasulu, in an open air space, with about 600 young kids. And there's the kamalengoni – the youth harp that Oumou Sangaré uses as the*



*basis of her music – on stage. This was the music... this was their way... in these villages, there were no nightclubs, there was nowhere where you could go and entertain yourself. So they took this [hunters'] music, and they made it their own. This is the kamalengoni and it's completely riotous! Because the dances of Wasulu are improvised, jerky movements, and that's why these dances were forbidden in the 1950s - when they first started. In fact they called the instrument samakoro which means, bedbug, because when it was played at night, the young kids couldn't sit still, they had to get out of their beds and they'd go to the clearing outside the village and they'd dance! But in any case, the reason why everyone's been laughing, is that they brought me up on stage and they made me do this dance, and I also was up there with Peter Culshaw from the Daily Telegraph [a music journalist who had come to Wasulu to write a piece on Oumou Sangaré], and he really got them going! He was imitating the main dancer, with wild jerky footsteps! It's a wonderful night, here in Wasulu."*

### 35.04 SPEECH LINK 13

OUMOU:

*"I've always used the kamalengoni harp in my music. It's the only instrument in Wasulu that the young people listen to. And I wanted my songs and my words to address the youth. The elders are already set in their ways, they are already polygamous, you can't change them. They already have many wives and many children. So I don't talk to the elders, I talk to the youth, to advise them not to make the same mistakes that our parents made. Now it's the favourite instrument of young people in the whole of Mali! You turn the TV on right now, and you'll see plenty of kamalengonis. Even Salif Keita has put the kamalengoni into his music on his latest album Moffou. And he's not even from Wasulu! Maybe I've had something to do with this...!"*

*I think I can say that I was the first of the wassoulou singers to sing for the youth, who had this spirit, this outlook on life. The problem in Africa is lack of information. In Europe, people read newspapers, they're all well informed, but not here; here it's the songs that can communicate best with people. 60% of Malians are unable to read, but everyone has time to listen to music. So it's only through music that you can change things."*

**Note:** Salif Keita is one of Mali's most celebrated male singers (Durán 2006). He is from Joliba, a village in the Manden heartland, north of Wasulu, and his musical style is predominantly Maninka, which is heptatonic, whilst the songs of Wasulu and of the *kamalengoni* are pentatonic. Nevertheless, on his last two albums, Moffou and M'Bemba (which was released in 2005 after this radio programme was made), the kamalengoni, played by Harouna Samake, is a heavily featured instrument, for example on the track *Madan*. Another example of a Maninka singer who has used the *kamalengoni* is the jeli from Guinea, Sekouba Bambino Diabate (Harouna Samake plays on the track *Balonta* from the album). This represents a new stylistic departure for both singers, and reflects the importance of the *kamalengoni* in Mali today, and the extent to which it now transcends regional styles.

### 36.30 SPEECH LINK 14

LUCY over sounds of jembe and dunun drums:

*"It's night time, and we're at an outdoor enclosure, and right in the middle are some young kids playing the drums, and they're warming up for the main event of tonight which is something called... it's a masquerade called sogoninkun, which means, 'the little antelope*

head'. And this is the music that Oumou Sangaré's mother used to sing when Oumou was growing up. Oumou would accompany her to the 'little antelope' masquerade, and sing with her. Tonight is a very special night because the people of Wasulu are going to perform *sogoninkun* specially for Oumou Sangaré to celebrate her coming here for only the fourth or fifth time in her life."

### 37.14 MUSIC 11

**Sogoninkun - Bakari ba.** Field recording, on location for the programme

Perf: musicians from Wasulu, two jembes and a dunun, led by *kono* (female singer)

Note: this is one of the very few recordings of this regional style of singing to accompany the *sogoninkun* masquerade dancers (see Imperato 1981 for one of the few written accounts of the masquerade).

### 38.35 SPEECH LINK 15

LUCY over music 11

"This is the masquerade tradition here in Wasulu called *sogoninkun*, and it's so exciting... not only is it fantastic to watch because the dancers move around the enormous circle formed by the people of the village – they do somersault after somersault, they twirl and turn, it looks as though they're flying in the air. And they're wearing these beautiful masks with tufts of antelope hair, and cloth, and bells around their ankles, which sound as they move and dance. So the whole thing is movement, and flying through the air. But the other thing about the *sogoninkun* is also that it's incredibly comic! Because they come up to people in the circle, and they play with them, they might even do a headstand or even jump on top of the chair that that person is sitting on. So they're always teasing the public, there's this teasing relationship. And they've just been teasing Oumou, in fact all of us have been teased by these masqueraders.

Oumou, the little antelope dance, what do you know about it, what do you know about its significance?"

OUMOU:

"This music is one of the only sorts of music in Wasulu in which the women sing. I mean, hunters' music for example, is always performed by men. In the early days, the masquerade dance was performed by people with magical powers - sorcerers. They would dance and jump really high. They could even jump onto the roof of a house. Their masks were mystical, and they could cure bad sorcery. And it was the women singers who put the dancers into this trance. And eventually, the singer herself would become so happy that she would also go into a trance."

**40.40: MUSIC 11** continues, with whistles and the sound of the dancers' ankle bells

### 41.18 SPEECH LINK 16

LUCY in countryside

"So Oumou, here we are, it's our last night in Wasulu before going back to Bamako... And this is only your fourth or fifth time in the region of Mali that really is the source of all your musical inspiration. What does it feel like for you to be here, in Wasulu?"

OUMOU

"Every time I come to Wasulu, I see something extraordinary, and I then take that experience back with me. For example, tonight I saw some young dancers, and I was really surprised and delighted at how skilful and inventive they were being. I can see that Wasulu is

*in their blood, and that the culture is not forced on them. It's very important to come back here, it inspires me. I can never be too far from Mali. I must always stay close to my inspiration."*

#### **42.14 SPEECH LINK 17**

LUCY walking through Bamako's largest market, in the city centre

*"This is the Marché Rose, which is a pink building in neo-Sahelian style. It's crowded and bustling; you can buy anything here from tie-dye cloth to spare parts for cars, mosquito nets, watches, local cassettes, shoes, children's clothes, ready-made boubous, Anything you like! Yesterday I made the long and bumpy journey back from Wasulu. Six hours. And here I am now in the centre of Bamako, which seems a world away. Oumou has swapped her traditional boubou for a pair of designer jeans, and last night we went out to one of Bamako's rocking dance clubs called the Platinum. That's where the young people of this city dance to everything, from the latest western pop music, to Mali's own thriving hip-hop scene..."*

**43.22 MUSIC 12** comes up under voice:

#### **Yala**

Perf and Comp: Oumou Sangaré

Track 8 from CD 1, Oumou

World Circuit Records WLWCD067

**LUCY LINK 17** continued over music 12

*"And they also dance to some of Oumou's biggest hits like Yala, which is aimed directly at the nightclub audience, and criticises young people who roam the town late at night in search of pleasure, forgetting their traditional values."*

**43.35 MUSIC 12** fade back up to end of song

#### **45.48 MUSIC 13**

#### **Dugu Kamalemba**

Perf and Comp: Oumou Sangaré

Track 5 from CD 1, Oumou, World Circuit Records WLWCD067

#### **46.01 SPEECH LINK 18**

OUMOU over music 13

*"I have never sung about excision - female circumcision - but I will. I am totally against it. Female excision is very convenient for men: it reduces the female's sensitivity, and so she cares less when the man brings ten other women into the house. It is painful and spreads disease and can increase the chances of death in childbirth.*

*I'm writing a song right now against excision, and we'll see what happens when I sing it in public!*

*My advice to mothers is to educate their daughters. In parts of Mali only three per cent of little girls go to school. This must change."*

#### **Music 13**

OUMOU link 18 continued:

*"Polygamy is painful for women. And the man who practices it will never be happy. If you have two wives, you can't laugh openly in front of them, you can never relax. Because you will never be free. You have one wife who you love, you want to laugh and enjoy yourself with her, but you can't! The other just sits there. There are maybe only 2 per cent of polygamous families for whom it works, the rest are utterly miserable."*

### **Music 13**

OUMOU link 18 continued:

*"This [Dugu kamalenba] is a song about polygamy. Often the men who take more than one wife are the womanisers. They try to seduce anything wearing a skirt. This was my first real open criticism of polygamy."*

*"Oh the youth of Mali, Oumou Sangaré is greeting you. Listen hard to what I have to say, be careful of the skirt chaser, they'll marry you with all the sweet words of the world."*

### **Music 13 back up**

## **48.36 SPEECH LINK 19**

LUCY (in Bamako):

*"Well over the past few days, in the villages of Wasulu, we've seen, with our own eyes, exactly what Oumou sings about, in that women do indeed have a very hard time in the villages, they work from 5 in the morning, they're doing all the hard tasks. At the same time, we've been talking to Oumou about her own personal experience, growing up in a family with a mother who was very saddened by having been abandoned by her husband for another wife, so this does seem to be very much Oumou's reality. And I'm here now with a Malian journalist and social activist, Adam Thiam. Adam - the women of Mali really love Oumou's music...?"*

ADAM THIAM (note: he is currently spokesperson for the African Union)

*"All women in this country think that Oumou is the artist who conveys in the best way, in the clearest way, messages women would like to send to the Malian leadership. As you know, women's condition here in Mali is still to be improved, there is a very low literacy rate - a very strong disparity between access to basic services, if you are a man or a woman... Very difficult access [for women] to health centres, very high mortality rate, in some regions it's even the highest mortality rate [among women] in the world, like Mopti. Very high exposure to sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS for instance, a man who has got AIDS normally from the point of view of society has been contaminated by the woman."*

LUCY

*"So it's always the woman's fault?"*

ADAM THIAM

*"Yes and the woman is responsible for it if he dies, even if the woman is contaminated which in most situations is the case, she's not accepted within that society."*

LUCY

*"Obviously a lot of Oumou's fan's are women, even when we were in the villages in Wasulu, we saw mostly women and children running after her, and singing her songs. We didn't see very many men do that. How do men receive her messages?"*

ADAM THIAM

*"Oumou is a real star, and she is the symbol of the new generation, people who are emerging out of nothing, really. Because women does not just defend the cause of women, she also denounces some of the bad behaviours of women, such as women who prostitute themselves,*

women who are not serving with loyalty their husbands, and things like that. That's the reason why she's a star for everyone, women and men and children".

LUCY

*"Do you think her music can change things?"*

ADAM THIAM

*"She inspired all this new wave of wassoulou singers who really portray the society, and in that respect, things could change, but you know, she's not alone in this fight for women. You have many women's organisations, you have all the NGOs working for that, and Oumou is part of this network, and I'm sure she's one of the engines of the changes that can take place with regard to women in the near future."*

## **52.13 MUSIC 14**

### **Djorolen**

Perf and Comp: Oumou Sangaré

Track 8 from CD 2, *Oumou* World Circuit Records WLWCD067

Hold under speech link 20

### **SPEECH LINK 20**

LUCY over sound of paddling

*"I'm on a canoe, on this great river, the Niger, which runs from the highlands of Guinea in the west, and loops its way through Mali all the way down to Nigeria. This river is where West Africa's greatest pre-colonial empire was based. And still today even here in Bamako you have a great sense of the country's long history, and the special role that music plays in it. It's no exaggeration to say that this is one of Africa's most musical countries, certainly the most musical place that I've ever visited, which is why I keep coming back here. And Oumou Sangaré is, without doubt, one of its greatest and most challenging artists – combining some of Mali's oldest traditions, with a powerful contemporary message."*

**Music 14** back up, hold under link 21

## **55.52: SPEECH LINK 21**

OUMOU:

*"I am the songbird – in my culture the songbird is the singer – I am talking to my public, asking them to remember the poor, those who have no power, no voice, no hope. Often it's the orphans or those who lose their parents early who have the greatest problems in life. I composed this song because poverty is getting worse in Africa - and through wars, there are so many orphans...."*

**Music 14** back up:

OUMOU link 21 continued:

*"The worried songbird cries out in the forest, her thoughts go far away  
For those who have no father, her thoughts go out to them."*

Note: this is a quote from the song text of *Djorolen*

**MUSIC 14 to end.**

