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- 1 In the 1970s, I vividly remember attending wedding ceremonies in Dyula villages where the brides, accompanied by their yet-unmarried age-mates, would dance bare-breasted holding photos of their jarabi, their sweetheart and singing tearful laments about how their relationship was abruptly coming to an end. Such public displays had ceased in larger towns such as Korhogo, where they seemed embarrassingly inconsistent with the strictures of proper Islamic behavior. A decade later, even in the villages the norms of Islamic propriety prevailed.
- 2 This delightful anthology of Dyula songs of love, sex, and marriages (by no means confounded!) recorded in the Dyula town of Kong in the 1970s brings a genre which is largely if not entirely extinct back to life. For the most part, these are sung by women —young and old, married and unmarried, indeed of slave and free status. Occasionally, choruses of young women and men alternately taunt one another playfully with accusations of sexual frivolity and faithlessness. Young unmarried girls sing the praises of their sweethearts or sometimes complain of their inconstancy. Brides lament the end of adolescence and sing about their anxieties about married life in anticipation of the “Thursday war”, their first sexual relations with their husbands, where they expected (at least in principle) to demonstrate their virginity through the public display of the bloodied cloth the next morning. Older married women deplore the

status of mangboya, the neglected co-wife. Woloso women, slaves “born in the house”, are licensed to sing obscene parodies of the songs of horon, free-born women. Aside from weddings, these songs accompany festive dances, the most popular being the kurubi, danced on certain nights during the month of Ramadan to the great dismay of more puritanically-minded Muslims.

- 3 The book is a vivid reminder that verbal arts among Mande-speaking peoples are not the exclusive prerogative of jeli, or “griots”. Even more important, the anthology focuses on the sensibilities of women. For once, the male perspective is not awarded pride of place. Of course, the attitudes conveyed publicly in women’s songs are of necessity conventional, if not stereotypical. Even so, these songs provided a socially acceptable avenue for women to express their preoccupations and, not least, their reservations about the men in their lives, whether husbands or boyfriends. This anthology provides a precious glimpse into the sentimental lives of Dyula women in the not-so-distant past.