



DOES AFRICA NEED MUSEUMS?

Communication of culture for development in Senegal and Mali,
West Africa

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African museums are to a large extent built by the colonizers to show their compatriots what Africa is. The collections are made by foreigners to the country. The present day museums are to a large extent, if not totally, dependent on foreign money for their existence. Yet in their strategies development agencies stress culture as an important ingredient of development. What culture? Whose culture? Can African culture, mostly intangible heritage, be placed within four walls, mostly to be visited by tourists? Can foreigners choose the way a cultural identity is presented? How free are museum directors to present cultural heritage when funding comes from abroad? How can cultural heritage be preserved and presented to raise self-respect and pride and build identities? This thesis, based on a recent field study in Senegal and Mali, raises questions about development aid, cultural heritage and neocolonialism.

INTRODUCTION

Following decolonization and the UNESCO-proclaimed World Decade on Culture and Development, cultural diversity and culture as such became important issues in development policies and development work.

My aim with the work hereby discussed was to put the focus on the possible role of museums as communicators of culture for the benefit of development and identity building in developing countries. I chose to do my field study in Senegal and Mali in West Africa. The study was carried out between December 2003 and February 2004. My thesis was examined in June 2004.

My field study
was based on
the 27
interviews I
made, plus

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available
material on
museums,
sites and
cultural
events, and

my prior experience of development aid and the cultures of West Africa, as well as my participation on sites and in cultural events. The purpose was to find views on culture in practice and as presented in museums in Senegal and Mali.

Museums are regarded as pillars of culture and safeguards of cultural heritage. But the museum construction is a “Western” invention. African museums, once set up by colonisers and their collected “exotica”, are undergoing considerable change in order to incorporate local culture from a local viewpoint, and seen as means to strengthen pride in the black African identity. Museums could play a significant role as communicators of culture and actors in society. Do they? Will they?

Culture history museums are expected to present and confirm a local, regional or national history. After independence, and in view of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), there is a rising interest in a new self-respect and an African identity. How can such tasks be fulfilled and combined to strengthen identity and development without nationalistic struggles?

Senegal and Mali, former French colonies and part of the French West Africa, are still strongly influenced by French culture, education and mentality. The museums were built by colonisers copying European ones to show other Europeans what Africa was. Their collections mirror the interests of European excitement and curiosity over the new continent, and still most visitors are western tourists coming to learn about the country they visit.

Museums in Senegal and Mali, whether governmental or privately owned, are heavily dependent on foreign support. How does this affect the way they act? Do West African museums continue to be mirrors of the European museum concept, or is there an adaption to suit local needs for safe-guarding cultural heritage? Do Africans use museums as they use cars and telephones, not invented on the continent? Is my thought that national cultural heritage should be the concern of the nation and not that of the “colonisers” a utopia in a globalized world?

MUSEUMS AND DEVELOPMENT

Museums in Africa are to an ever larger degree focusing on participating in the development strategy of the continent. Through the consolidation of AFRICOM, in October 2003, African museums strengthen their efforts to contribute to development by educating about African culture from a “south-south” perspective. WAMP, the West African Museum Programme, with members in 17 countries, has efficiently and effectively promoted museum development aiming at the social development of their communities for 20 years.

It is therefore in line with SIDA's -the Swedish government-supported organization- main goals for cultural cooperation, human freedoms, women's rights and peace efforts that in the summer of 2003 an agreement is signed to give assistance to the non-profit making WAMP, based in Dakar, Senegal, with 800 million Cfa (SEK 11,3 million) for a 3-year period. This first-time direct support is for the promotion of 145 [\[1\]](#) West African museums in 17 countries during a 3-year period, and signifies a change in focus for SIDA's support to concentrate on culture. WAMP aims to use the support for capacity building, training and a small grants programme to facilitate communication, foster co-operation with local communities, and involve the population in managing the African cultural heritage. Will this support make a difference in development?

During my conversations with the SIDA staff, it was said that the south perspective, so cherished in the policy statements, rarely comes into practise. The decisions are made at the head office in Stockholm. Only occasionally, initiatives from SIDA representatives in the field, or initiatives coming from local institutions or organizations, receive support.

So, is it possible to pursue a national or African museum policy? Is it desirable, or should West Africa choose other ways to communicate their culture to visitors and citizens? What do western and African museums stand to gain from their joint heritage?

MUSEUMS IN SENEGAL AND MALI

West African museums are not isolated from other museums. The influence from western museums remains strong, and foreign financial support is vital for these culture institutions' postcolonial survival: exhibitions, conservation, and collection. Basic funding of buildings, electricity, water, and basic staff costs, are sometimes provided by the government.

Colonial structures still prevail. An example is the popular Musée d'Art Africain in Dakar, which was originally the museum of the French West Africa. Its collections of 10,000 objects contain very few Senegalese artifacts. Senegal does not have a national museum. The National Museum of Mali is situated in the capital, Bamako. Two new galleries, financed by the EU and furnished with new exhibitions, produced and

sponsored by the Dutch, opened in October 2003.

Africans do not know themselves, and less still their neighbors[2]. If museums are instruments of the collective memory, then why are the people who visit them, especially Africans, so few? A 1999 survey shows that less than five percent of the pupils in African schools visit the museums located in their vicinities, and so we have to understand that Africans do not find these institutions important. Taking into account that 50 percent of the population in Senegal are under the age of fifteen, informants fear that knowledge of culture amongst young people due to urbanisation and influence from abroad is vanishing quickly.

“Many tourists come to discover the museum”, says Massamba Lam, conservator at the IFAN in Dakar. “The schools come –if the teachers want to, if they have the money for transport (if they are in the Dakar area: my remark). They don’t look at the masks but study slavery or follow programs. Africans can see the same things in their villages with family and friends, including the atmosphere. Why would they come to museums?” The distance can also be a problem.

David E. Aradeon, Professor of Architecture, University of Lagos, in “Museums in West Africa”[3], remarks that these social and cultural institutions, whose missions were not fully understood nor appreciated, were inherited from the colonial powers by the West Africans. National museums in Dakar and Bamako are housed in imposing buildings in the colonial institutional quiet environment belt. They were made by Europeans to show other Europeans what Africa was.

But the majority of the objects collected are kept in museums of the west. “Numerous African objects in museums in Europe and America are inaccessible to us”, complains Abdoulaye Camara. And many western museums are reluctant to give loans or retribute African objects, fearing low security and conservation conditions[4]. Some museums, like the British Museum for instance, have clearly stated that they consider their museums universal and that universal museums will not give back objects. The ways in which these objects landed in western museums are in themselves history and testimony of past times.

However, culture as a road to identity and pride in a new nation has taken a new turn with the rising interest in the heritage in Africa. After independence, a new need to find self-respect, an African identity and proof of history, as the oral tradition in the form of tales, songs, music and storytellers dye out, has seen new light. Many are aware of this effect of urbanisation.

The late Dr. Philip Ravenhill, an Africanist anthropologist and museum curator, initiator of the West African Museums Programme (WAMP) in 1982 as well as its first director, writes in the introduction to “Museums and the Community in West Africa”: “Museums as institutions of cultural importance should be part of the community they serve. They should be responsive to the needs of the community and the museums and the

community, both working together, should effectively contribute to the growth and development of the community”

“Urbanisation is pushing people away from traditions and knowledge of old objects” says Tereba Togola, director the Cultural Heritage of Mali. “I myself am from a small village. I know everything about the objects used there, but will my children? They have never seen a Sacred Forest. With the centralisation to the big cities like Bamako and Dakar, the culture is not visible in daily life. Museums could play a role in documenting and communicating the cultural aspects of our life by means of new media. But the museums must change their concept. They must reach out to society and involve the inhabitants of communities. Get out of their walls.”

A young student volunteer at the Mali National Museum’s education department strongly emphasises the need for museums: “We must preserve and restore African history, especially for young girls”, she said fiercely. We have adopted a French education system. Earlier everything was a museum, but the colonisation destroyed the culture to implant the European cultures, it was brain washing, they had no interest in the prevailing culture.

African museums are confronted with many problems, not only financial. How should the African identity be presented, not only to Africans in Africa and the Diaspora but also to the descendants of African emigrants in Europe and the United States? “Who could be more qualified to answer their questions but the museums?”, asks Goudonou [5]. But has no answer, as the museums are not able to provide such information.

“To westerners objects in museums are for admiration, to Africans they are objects of cult, part of the spiritual life of a group, given a complete history through the overall existing animism. These objects are integrated in the ceremony and should not be viewed apart from that. If they are exported the value is lost. Traditional preservation always existed here”. Ousseynou Wade, general secretary of Dak’Art [6] comments that African art to westerners was like *curiosa*, later scrutinized by anthropologists and ethnologists.

But there is also a problem of where the African cultural heritage is to be found.

“The best pieces are in foreign countries”, says Fatima Fall at the CRDS museum in St Louis. “They are perhaps better preserved than they would be here. But we live in this community and our understanding of these objects is different from those who do not know our culture.”

DIFFERENT VIEWS ON CULTURE AND MEMORY

FESNAC

The 4th Festival National des Arts et de la Culture [7] (FESNAC) was celebrated on 18-22 December 2003 in Ziguinchor, second largest city in Senegal and capital of the Casamance region, situated south of the

Gambia. The aim with FESNAC is to “give back the heritage in its richness, but also its dynamics and development, to allow the Senegalese to know each other better, to discover what unites them and thus contribute to the consolidation of national unity. To unite all Senegalese around the cultural richness, promote national tourism and find national and international markets for local cultural products”.

Here the most popular performers were the Koumpo and the Kankourang masks, endowed with mystic powers, looking after the newly circumcised and protector of the society, associated with all the joyous feasts of the Mandinka [8] tradition. The masked symbols of the initiation rite can be seen in village streets. A bleak copy of the real Kankourang dancing at the FESNAC in bright orange plant barks stands to greet visitors in the IFAN museum in Dakar, where it is impossible to imagine the performance and the significance of this figure. Why would you want to visit a museum to see just objects when you could participate in the whole ceremony at home?

SITES, MEMORIALS AND MEMORY

Memorial or museum? Gorée or Black civilisations

On July 18 2003, the President of the Republic of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade, laid the first stone to the Museum of Black Civilisations (Musée des Civilisations Noires) in Dakar, pronouncing it to be a giant step to restore the pride in African history.

Hamady Bocum, director of Cultural Heritage, Ministry of Culture in Senegal, thinks the museum is a good idea. “We need to safeguard the cultural diversity for the postcolonial generations. A Mexican architect has planned it and it will consist of a museum, a festival, a library, a theatre for multicultural performances, a monument of African Renaissance and a Monument for Memories and solemn occasions”.

The aim is to create a place of memory, reflection and meetings and to strengthen the bonds between Africa and the Africans of the Diaspora. It will be linked to the UNESCO cultural heritage site of Ile de Gorée [9]. The imposing memorial is to consist of a research and promotion centre of the African patrimony, a research centre on slavery, a contemporary art museum and a navigation museum, a planetarium, an exhibition hall for all cultural works, a panoramic platform with a view of Dakar and the island of Gorée, a landing stage for the boat to Gorée. The memorial will face the Americas and is to be erected as an African village witnessing a tragedy which splits it up in two parts, separated by the ocean. There is a “but”, the problem of financial support –to be sought abroad.

The Joola

In September 2002, the ferry Joola, the main transport link between southern and northern Senegal, perished in the sea off the Gambian coast carrying an unknown number of passengers (some say as many as 2.800, official figures today say 1.863). Ten percent of the population in the

western part of Casamance, mainly school children, students and teachers returning to Dakar after the summer holidays died.

After the tragedy of the Joola, the authorities were afraid to put up a memorial site, as the reactions to it might “cause disturbances” and fuel the accusations of mismanagement and apparent negligence against the government. “A whole generation died and we have no place to mourn”, I often heard in my conversations. No museum has taken up this topic in their exhibitions.

The House of Slaves

With historic sufferings the situation is apparently different. Closely linked to the Gorée Memorial is the Maison des Esclaves [10], where guide and conservator Boubacar Joseph Ndiaye is the master of oral tradition. To intensely listening overseas tourists he relives the drama of slavery, telling his very personal story of the slave trade, the journey of no return. Many cry. The Pope, Nelson Mandela, Bush, they all have been here, to pay tribute to this dark period of African history. Here the Day of Abolition is commemorated to institutionalize the memory and prevent oblivion [11].

Joseph Ndiaye incarnates the soul of Gorée. “This is our past”, he says, demonstrating chains and packing sketches of the slave ships. The Maison is an empty house, presently featuring the story of the slave trade in words and pictures. The beauty of the island, the darkness of the dungeons where Ndiaye says the slaves were kept before shipment to the Americas, the intensity of his storytelling, spellbinds visitors. This is where it happened. This is where your ancestors were tortured and imprisoned. This is the point of no return. Historians, who have raised doubts about his stories, have been reprimanded and made to take back their accusations about faking history. Ndiaye and the Maison, built in 1786, are symbols, no matter what the truth is.

Irrespective of the academic discussions - whether it was the 40 million slaves Ndiaye says that passed through the door of no return, the slave trade went on for hundreds of years and needs to be given a memorial space.

Thiaroye

In a small park at the centre of Bamako, the capital of Mali, I by chance found another one of a few African memorials situated in a different city than it would be expectable: the newly erected memorial of African soldiers fighting for the French in the Second World War. A statue of a soldier and in the background four symbolic canons directed towards one point. A sign says: “In memory of those executed in Thiaroye. On 1 December 1944 at the camp of Thiaroye, outside Dakar, Africans soldiers, many of them Sudanese, had claimed their pay and demobilisation money and were shot for doing so”.

The Senegalese Tirailleurs

Another story can be seen in the Musée des Forces Armées (Army

Museum) in Dakar. The Senegalese Tirailleurs (sharp shooters) fought in Europe in the First and Second World War. The museum features an authentic-looking trench from October 1916, but smells and sounds have not been added. A photograph shows a black soldier in the mud, completely exhausted, no shoe on his left foot, staring eyes under the helmet.

General Clemenceau passed this area on October 4 1916, when the Senegalese got out of the trenches. He wrote: "A sharp shooter was photographed coming out of the concurred fort. They were black men coming out of the trenches. They had been there for 18 days, they were walking skeletons, ghosts, broken rifles but they were magnificent! When they saw me they started playing the Marseillaise, I don't know with what stones on pieces of wood. I talked to them. I don't think they understood us. I said that they were about to liberate themselves by fighting together with us. That we were brothers, children of the same civilisation and the same ideas. Words seemed small next to them. Their courage and their nobleness". The photo and text is part of the permanent exhibition called "Les tirailleurs sénégalais—La symbolique nationale" [12]. Created in 1829 and consisting of 89 black sharp shooters in the French army, they signify the first combined army of Christians and Muslims.

This museum, mostly visited by national and international military staff, was created in 1998 by the Senegalese Armed Forces, and shows the history of the Senegalese army up till today's participation in UN forces worldwide. It is well presented and informative. And as many museums all over the world, over-neutral. It does not mention the Thiaroye massacre, which has a memorial in Bamako.

AFRICAN OR WESTERN?

"Il faut tuer les musées occidentals" [13]. Alpha Omar Konaré, president of ICOM between 1989-1992 and president of Mali between 1992-2002, now Chairman of the African Union (UA), did not hesitate to take a standpoint, and he is quoted in many discussions I have had with museum colleagues. In "The Creation and Survival of Local Museums", he writes: "...we who work in museums and the cultural heritage must question the options we have hitherto accepted as to what a museum ought to be... Every time the question is raised we hear it said that museums are foreign institutions, that they are not part of our culture, even though we used to have structures that could be regarded as places where things were conserved... We must think carefully about the most suitable means of preserving our cultural heritage. We feel that there is only one answer: to be in close contact with our culture and history. No one else will do it for us".

Yet the newly reopened National Museum of Mali (October 7 2003), situated in a calm park in the outskirts of bustling, crowded Bamako, must count among the European-modelled. Two vast new galleries, a restaurant, a museum shop, a film theatre, and a space for open air performances have been added.

I wonder: do foreign museum curators and anthropologists use these generous galleries as showrooms to make exhibitions to satisfy their own curiosity about Africa?

DISCUSSION: DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND CULTURE

“The West is regarded as the model and we as less developed. What is that? There are different stages of poverty. The poverty of stress, of depression, of being too technical. Africa is not the “almost”-model. Western development means modern technique. In Africa it is food, children, cattle, joy of life, a basic level of wealth. The West thinks, how can Africa pick up and become like us? In Africa we think: What needs do we have?”, demands a Dakar inhabitant.

“Western theories are like development overcoats”, says one informant. “They do not take the social aspect into account. A functioning infrastructure does *not* solve all problems. Instead it is a cultural issue. And culture is about understanding.” He emphasises that Africans need things to be proud of, and to realise that you must not constantly accept non-African habits and products, without reflecting.

What is development then? Peter Worsley [14] defines true development as the realization of who gets what, that what people get is what they need to enrich their quality of life. Can development assistance contribute to such development? Can museums?

“Our vision is not only for the museums to cooperate with the community but also show people that they can make a lively hood from managing their culture well. The community should take responsibility for their own culture and find means to exploit it, for example through women’s handicraft, as women are in the majority in Africa, and they can play an important role as safeguarders of the cultural heritage”, says the director of the West African Museum Programme.

A countryman says: “Yes I have my culture and it is great. But it must not stop there. We must have a culture industry so that people can live from it. We produce to live. Culture is a merchandise which belongs to a people. They must profit from that culture. You must live from your culture and what your culture produces, not live your culture. Oil does not develop, people do. You can give people financial support, maybe they will survive, but it is when they can make a life by what they earn themselves, that they are contented.”

A similar worry comes from an artist quoted in the essay of a Norwegian scholar. Will he be able to continue his work for development in Senegal without being ‘colonized’ by foreign NGOs? [15] This situation is also relevant for cultural institutions living almost entirely on subsidies from western sources like the World Bank and UN bodies; French, Belgian, Swiss, Dutch, the Americas, Spanish, German, Swedish, Norway, Denmark, but also Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese and Saudi-Arabian

development agencies; the Ford Foundation, Getty Grant, SIDA, UN, UNESCO, you name them: they seem all to be involved in every cultural activity in West Africa.

Are cultural institutions free to answer to the needs of the communities and nations they are to serve, when their financing depends on their ability to comply to pre-set conditions set up by donors who build their conditions to receive aid on western ideals? How free are they to serve as communicators of their culture when the “overcoat” is deciding whether their work will be sustainable or not? Assistance is given for short periods and can be withdrawn with short notice. Would the will to engage in long-term projects be the same?

In a Swedish television programme called “Dokument utifrån” [16], aired on May 20 2004, Ghana’s foreign minister deplored the fact that development assistance is given under the condition that under-priced western goods can be sold on African markets and that, without the export subventions of the EU and the USA enabling us to get rid of surplus production undermining local production, Africa would be self-sufficient and not need assistance. These domestic subventions correspond to the total value of foreign aid to the continent. How does this correspond to culture and development?

Donors are not really donors: they are acting for their own good. Recipients are not recipients, but acting to solve their personal problems and support their status. Then, who is helping who? Development in colonial terms meant to make colonies cost-effective but not necessarily industrialised. The western way of life was assumed to be the way forward [17]. Has anything changed?

Yet in development there is no turning back. Economy is crucial. It all boils down to survival and to money, in the end. You have to be able to live by your culture, not live your culture. If you are dependent on funding from the outside, you are not free to make your own choices. And as one informant said: “If you are starving, is culture and history really that important?”

NEW VISIONS FOR MUSEUMS

“Comrads, let us not pay any tribute to Europe by forming states, institutions and societies that it has inspired. Mankind expects something else from us other than this... obscene imitation” [18], says Fanon. But West African museums are still built as European museums and, like the National Museum of Mali, with money from European or Western donors.

The western-inherited museums contain objects that no longer bear any relation to the living culture, and the young do not know where the museums are and do not visit them, says Ousseynou Wade, General Secretary of Dak’Art and previously consultant to the Ministry of Culture in Senegal. “These museums are closed to those who possess the real

knowledge, the true culture. If we pay more attention to objects than to man and society, we shall conserve nothing. An object cannot be conserved outside man or outside society. Therefore the future museums should not be conceived for a minority of foreigners or intellectuals but for the majority of the population. In Africa objects are not devoid of meaning and cannot be presented without its context of ceremonies, traditions with which it is associated”.

What objects should show the history of Senegal and Mali? These nations were created in 1960. Before that time, they were part of the French West Africa, which is why the Musée d'Art Africain in Dakar cannot be the National Museum of Senegal: it contains the collections of French West Africa, and very few objects come from Senegal. And before colonization, West African empires had totally different borders.

Alpha Oumar Konaré, former president of ICOM and of Mali, argues that the best way is where monuments are scattered about, with the objects remaining in the hands of their owners. Find another designation other than museum! Collect and document and give back to the community. The story of a community is told through its objects. Study and present the objects as witnesses of our era or how they came here, what we used them for and what the connections to other continents are. Use the Internet to facilitate access. Then the objects become signals to communicate culture. Museums for merely observing are for tourists.

SUMMING UP: DOES AFRICA NEED MUSEUMS?

In “Wretched of Earth”, Frantz Fanon accuses the colonisers of distorting, deforming and destroying the history of the oppressed. The coloniser creates history, and the history he produces is not that of the colonised; statues of the general who conquered, of the constructor of the bridge [\[19\]](#), to say “We created this country.” He urged his comrades not to imitate Europe but to start a new history of man, showing Europe’s crimes as well as its virtues. [\[20\]](#)

“50 years ago Africa was a continent without a history”, says a sign in the National Museum of Mali. Tereba Togola, director of Mali’s Cultural Heritage, remarks that it is not even 50 years ago. Maybe Africa does not yet have a history. But the cultural heritage is there in abundance. It is being researched and documented by European and foreign anthropologists and archaeologists, and presented at best in the museums created by the colonisers. In both countries it may seem that there are mostly westerners and foreign aid money engaged in preserving and protecting the cultural heritage.

So, can the cultural heritage be reclaimed and at the same time become the financial resource that West African countries desperately need?

If you are poor, as the majority of the population in Senegal and Mali is, your main concern may not be that of safeguarding your cultural heritage.

Objects are too precious to be given to museums, and Africa's history is not about objects, but about the total concept of a ceremony or a life style. Yet African scholars and laymen agree: Africa needs an identity and a history to be proud of, memorials of African concern, a counter vision to the commonly spread wars, famine and disease view of the African continent. And urbanisation quickly undermines cultural traditions. You have to find ways to live by your culture, according to Boureïma Diamitani, director of WAMP.

In one of my interviews, an NGO director was quite pragmatic: "museums must make choices about what to safeguard and let the market take over the other items as people are extremely poor. Museums are only visited by tourists. For how long will developing countries be able to afford to pay for museums for tourists?". The African way of life is disappearing rapidly. It is too adaptable to neo-colonialism, an informant says. "Museums should not be built for tourists. Ethnic groups, artists and craftsmen should be strengthened and supported in maintaining their identities and in disseminating knowledge of their history in less ostensive ways. Otherwise Africans may at last have to become tourists in their own country in their own museums to learn about and discover their culture."

Development agencies now focus on culture as a main ingredient in development aid. But museums in their present form cannot play an important role for development. "Museums are occidental and foreign to Africa. If they are to play a role they must be pushed to reach out to society and involve the inhabitants." Can they do the job?

The museum as an institution needs to be reconsidered, not only in Africa. As the discourse among museum professionals within ICOM shows, the issue is hot. Museums struggle to move into society and to work with questions of everyday life to involve citizens. Now the focus is on intangible heritage, which includes voices, values, traditions, languages, oral history, folk life, creativity, adaptability and the distinctiveness of a people perceived through the manifestations of cuisine, clothing, shelter, traditional skills and technologies, religious ceremonies, manners, customs, performing arts, story telling, etc. [21] Indeed a huge task for museums.

This could make room for other alternatives, not locked up within four walls. Maybe cultural institutions could even become the centres of economic activity that Massamba Lam, conservator at the IFAN museum, envisages. A change of name might be appropriate. Maybe it is not "museums" that Africa, or the rest of the world for that matter, needs, but another form for the use of cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, where the natural integration of history and heritage is part of everyday life and allowed to play an economical role for development.

New approach

One example of a new approach in safeguarding cultural heritage is the

Cultural Bank: in the small village of Fombori, in Mali, the local museum person and a Peace Corps worker with little means created the Banque Culturelle [22], now also supported by the West African Museum Programme (WAMP). The Cultural Bank helps rural communities safeguard their cultural resources in a unique way by combining the facilities of a bank and a museum.

People lend their objects to the museum, which documents, organises and exhibits them in a local gallery. In exchange for this, a loan to finance small business is granted. When the loan is repaid, the object returns to the owner. The bank neither buys nor sells the cultural objects, which at all time remain the property of the owners. Instead of transforming heritage into lucrative commerce on the black market, the Cultural Bank uses it as a resource to conserve, maintain and cherish. In this new model of the development of the African community, the management of cultural resources is decentralized, and the cultural identity and the pride are strengthened.

“We must not hide ourselves, these are poor countries,” proclaims Massamba Lam, conservator at the IFAN museum in Dakar. “The priorities are health and poverty. If the bearers of culture do not have enough to eat, there is no culture. So there are priorities. Culture is important but only on the condition that this culture in itself contributes to development. Do we want to continue to say “Help us help ourselves”, or are we going to put our hands in the dough?”

Vision and suggestions

My vision and suggestions for the safeguarding of cultural heritage leave out the notion of “museum”. I believe that we need to move on and away from this term, too associated with stagnancy and dusty object enclosed within walls. Cultural heritage, tangible as well as intangible, needs more flexible, border crossing ways to stay alive in the community and serve the needs of the living. Among them, I would stress:

1. *Places of Memory*

The feeling of being “where it happened” is unbeatable.

2. *Mini-museums*

The tourists come to find information about the region or country they are visiting.

3. *Culture Banks*

Objects and documentation in the form of science, literature, photographs, art works, media archives, films, music, food recipes, original documents representing and safeguarding the culture of the region in time and space, chosen and collected by a group of competent, open-minded, visionary people and kept in a Culture Bank.

4. Border crossing “*Cultural Centres*”, where all aspects of human life are presented and integrated in time and space.

5. *Cooperation* between cultural centres and communities for economic development and awareness-making, like the innovative initiatives of WAMP.

But above all, and most importantly, the community and its inhabitants must feel the *need* for, and have the *will* to preserve, their cultural heritage.

This leads me to rephrase my initial question and turn it into “Does Africa need a cultural heritage?”. And the answer is simple: yes. Just as every human being needs its history and culture. Thus every person is in himself a museum, with memories, objects and a story to tell.

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[4] Senegal. Institutional Aims and Objectives. (1995).
[5] Skelton and Allen (ed) (1999), Culture and Global Change.
[6] Biennial de Dakar, the only art biennial in Africa.
[7] National Festival of Arts and Culture.
[9] From the Memorial de Gorée brochure (2000).
[10] The House of Slaves on the island of Gorée, World Heritage site since 1978 (Unesco), off the coast of Dakar
[11] <http://fr.allafrica.com>Le Soleil 14 Aug 2003. Printed 15 Aug 2003.
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[13] The western museums must be killed.
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[20] Fanon, F. (1962) Jordens fördomda
[21] From the “Museums and Intangible Heritage” Conference brochure.
[22] Presentation by coordinator/initiator Alou Hama Cissé of the Cultural Bank of Fomboriat the AFRICOM general conference in Nairobi, Kenya, 30 September 2003.uzdel

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