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A Policy of Intangible Cultural Heritage between Local Constraints and International Standards: “The Cultural Space of the *yaaral* and the *degal*”¹

Anaïs Leblon

1 Introduction

“The cultural space of the *yaaral* and the *degal*” in Mali was included on the UNESCO list of *Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* on the initiative of the Malian government in November 2005. Based on the ethnography of the process of heritagization of these *Fulbe* pastoralists’ transhumance festivals in the Inner Niger Delta, I follow the proposals of Ferdinand de Jong and Michael Rowlands. In the introduction to *Reclaiming Heritage. Alternative Imaginaries of Memory in West Africa* (2007), these authors invite researchers to focus on the local appropriations of policies of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in Africa, particularly of UNESCO, by studying local, national and international constructs of cultural heritage. UNESCO has become an international institution for heritage legitimization by recognizing and classifying certain cultural expressions under the label of “heritage of humanity.” With the introduction of the concept of ICH, UNESCO imposes new standards for cultural heritage selection. Cultural heritage must, from now on, be defined in a dynamic view of culture (Hafstein 2004, Bortolotto 2006, Turgeon 2010), which involves the active participation of the communities con-

¹ This article is based on data acquired during several field studies lasting a total duration of 12 months (2007–2010) in the context of research on the heritagization of *Fulbe* pastoral institutions for a doctorate in anthropology at the University of Provence.

cerned in the nomination process (Blake 2009). Selection criteria emphasize interculturality and respect for human rights (UNESCO 2003). I seek to lay open the encounter between the normative logics of international selection procedures for ICH and the actual application of such criteria by representatives of the state and actors within affected communities with a detailed ethnography of the classification procedures, applications of programs for protecting cultural heritage, as well as forms of presentation of the past and identity.

Building on Revel's notion of scales of analysis (1996), I will look at the process of heritagization of the *Fulbe* pastoral festivals by the Mali State as an "arena" (Bierschenck and Olivier de Sardan 1998) within which the actors develop a pragmatic relationship with the patrimonialized object. This will allow me to describe how the patrimonial dynamics at work in the construction of the relationship to the past, to identity and to territory, held by different participants (pastoralists, heritage agents, mayors, politicians) interconnect, contrast, contradict, and/or join together. My analysis is situated within a broader study of contemporary sociopolitical dynamics that cultivate heritagization with all its transformative effects.

The institutional heritagization of these festivals by the establishment of a plan of action and protection under the National Directorate of Cultural Heritage (DNPC) takes place in a context of increasing instability of Malian pastoral activity.² In the 19th century, the *Fulbe* Empire of the *Diina* of the *Maasina* organized the Delta in favor of pastoral activity and established precedence, shelters and transhumance routes. Several sociopolitical (abolition of slavery, transfer of ownership of livestock) and ecological (droughts, decrease in flooding levels) changes led to a loss of power of pastoralists, who were not always able to ensure the maintenance of their pastoral infrastructures (Turner 1992, Barrière and Barrière 2002, Marie 2002). In the mid-1990s, a new decentralization policy³ revived tensions over land (Fay 1998). While set in the background of heritage development, issues relating to ecology, economy, insecurity of pastoral activity, and political management of the territory reveal the reasons and policy stakes entangled with heritage matters. They are closely related to the management of different cultural identities which are connected with production sectors (Fay 1997), as well as to the development of the Delta territory in the context of political decentralization.

It is thus important to see how heritage agents combine the constraints of their own cultural policies with the normative demands of UNESCO. While heritagization now promotes a dynamic view of culture, we need to ask how socio-economic changes, re-creations of identity and the *Fulbe* pastoral practice will be treated in the different phases of the institutional program of heritage production (from candidacy to the implementation of the heritage protection program). Further questions to consider are how the involvement of the population in protection activi-

² The plan of action was carried out from January 2007 to April 2009. The UNESCO–Japan *Funds-in-Trust for the Preservation and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage* funding was US \$74,470.

³ This is the effective transfer of part of the powers at the village level organized by communities.

ties has been promoted, and what role is given to endogenous concepts of heritage and to the measures proposed by the populations to promote them? Study of the candidacy dossier and the subsequent inventory enables one to compare UNESCO standards for a legitimate patrimonial production to its effective realization in a bottom-up approach constructed *a posteriori*. This reveals what is at stake in the heritagization of a cultural space which, before becoming a patrimonial good, was a place of demonstration of identity and a pastoral activity in crisis.

2 The Context of Institutional Heritagization: The Candidacy Dossier and the Justification of Classification

The National Directorate of Cultural Heritage (DNPC), organ of the Malian Minister of Culture, has led several survey missions in order to prepare the candidacy dossier for the “cultural space of the *yaaral* and the *degal*” since 2003. In that capacity, it benefited from the expertise of UNESCO-Bamako and the support of “resource persons” as much at local and regional as at national levels. The classification as proposed and adopted by UNESCO makes reference to the transhumance space of *Fulbe* pastoralists of the inner Delta of the Niger River and, more particularly, the spectacular festivities sprinkling the calendar of pastoral activities. Among these, the *yaaral* of the *Jafaraabe* and the *degal* of the *Jallube*, respectively the first point of entry to the Delta and the last event of the pastoral calendar, benefit from a program of heritage development. This choice is linked to the strategic position of these festivals in the regulation of animal movement between deltaic pastures during the dry season and Sahelian pastures during the rainy season. The choice is enhanced by the memory that at the end of the colonial period and during the first years of independence, a public composed of politicians, functionaries and administrators was present for the events. Public powers were present at the time in part to signal their desire to control one of the most important economic activities in Mali.

Yaaral designates the crossing of the *Jaaka* River at *Jafaraabe* in December with herds returning from the Sahel. The *degal* is the descent of herds at *Jallube* in April to the last pastures of the dry season north of the Inner Niger Delta (Figure 1). These two festivals validate pastoral activity through livestock parades, competitions for the fattest herd and the declamation of pastoral poetry.

These festivals are presented as emblems of *Fulbe* identity and culture in the UNESCO candidacy dossier prepared by the DNPC. The argument pays particular attention to *Fulbe* social and esthetic values in the pastoral way of life, attachment to cattle and the richness of the *Fulfulde* language expressed in the pastoral poetry and songs of the young girls. Such promotion of the *Fulbe* culture for itself is complemented by other arguments combining regional history, historical depth of the good to be patrimonialized and especially the promotion of cultural diversity ap-

pealing to a new heritage standard supported by UNESCO (Leblon 2011a: 201–202). To express this, the candidacy dossier promotes *Fulbe* traditions dating back to the founding of the *Diina* of the *Maasina* at the beginning of the 19th century that enabled different populations of the Delta to renew their intercommunity pacts and to live in harmony (DNPC 2004: 6, 11, 12). Each ethnic group of the region is thus associated with a professional activity and esthetic norms or standardized ways of dressing meant to identify them (Leblon 2011a: 203).

The identity metaphor of the richness of cultural diversity by serving a discourse on the cohesion between groups is a means of making reference to the regulations for the use of natural resources and to power relations between those exploiting them. The distribution of groups in this region “renvoie à un rapport réglé entre ethnicité, spécialité professionnelle et milieu naturel” (Fay 1989: 160, Gallais 1968). This justification of patrimonial value, taking recourse to a normative discussion on the intercommunity links and cohesion between groups, comes during a moment of tension: Access rights to “properties” – water, pasturage, land (Fay 1989) – and political decentralization are on the horizon. Resolving conflicts between the different actors in the Delta is presented as one of the most pressing challenges to achieve a plan for sustainable management of the 5th Region’s natural resources (Mosely et al. 2002: 105, Barrière and Barrière 2002). The state appears thus to be less desirous of revalorizing pastoral activities in themselves; rather, the relationship of transhumance festivities and other activities regulating access to natural resources and land are focal. The institutional patrimonial rhetoric has, however, never made explicit reference to an ecology of peaceful and sustainable resource management.

The objective presented by the institutional program is to preserve the “cultural and environmental integrity of local communities,” “to perpetuate in autonomy the cultural space and the pertaining traditions in order to ensure a future of know-how,” “to identify and group existing traditions in a common base,” and also to “raise awareness of tourists of the fragility of the site” (DNPC 2006: 5). Protection activities thus essentially concern inventory, documentary collection, awareness raising, and educational activities. To this end, the population identified as holder of the good to be patrimonialized is invited to participate in “protection” practices: It is foreseen that certain people within the group will act as authority figures to set out what should be preserved. The elements retained will then provide the reflection of heritage awareness shared by the local populations. One of the paradoxes of this project is to insist on a “bottom-up” protection, although it is in a large part constructed *a posteriori*. The DNPC agents devised this project unilaterally – as a function of UNESCO’s criteria for ICH; the population was brought in to participate only once the project was crafted.

This raises two main questions: Do the modalities of protection planned correspond to what is already in progress within the society? And how are the institutional concepts and procedures to be translated for the group concerned?

The concept of ICH was translated from the first surveys in preparation for the candidacy dossier by the expression *finaa-tawaa*, meaning “we are born, we have found.”⁴ This is a common utterance in the tradition considered, referring to cultural heritage received from preceding generations. This heritage is “older” (*beccude*) than the individuals who will “follow” (*jokkude*) it or not. It is considered to be an intergenerational transmission of utterances, goods, representations, knowledge, practices, activities, and rules. *Finaa-tawaa* is thus used to justify the practices carried out during the festivals of *jaaral* and *degal*. However, its use is not limited to the festive domain. It covers different aspects of social life, such as professional specialization or respect for social hierarchies.⁵ For the latter, it refers to a value system and individual status defined by genealogical affiliation. This word thus covers a broad range of meanings. It can be applied to material goods which a person has inherited, to the natural environment, and it even serves as a definition of culture and identity. This social construction of tradition proposes a normative, immutable framework to elements deemed characteristic and indispensable for the maintenance of institutions and the collective identity of members of the group who claim this tradition (or who are assigned to it). However, because the found practice is attached to a specific place and time: “En naissant en un lieu, on y a trouvé,” as Jacky Bouju has emphasized for the expression of the tradition in the Dogon context (1995: 105), it is necessary to take account of the context in which the practice claimed as “found in being born” is realized, since this condition forms part of the heritage received. By placing the accent on reception of the heritage, the tradition is open to transformations associated with developments in a given context. In other words, the expression of continuity is constructed by references and common access to a certain number of practices, symbols and values. However, this pronouncement of continuity authorizes and integrates changes in meaning depending on the generation or the status of the individuals who utter a claim. By insisting on a particular way of doing or saying something, the individual aims to conform to a practice for which he or she is recognized as being the heir, but he or she has a creative power over this practice. Each individual can potentially participate in the construction of festivals and in the selection of what will be retained or excluded as cultural heritage. The social actors’ ability and capacity to negotiate and sometimes distort what is to be recognized as tradition or not while

⁴ The expression *finaa-tawaa* is constructed from the verb *finude*, literally to wake up, to rouse (Seydou 1998: 188), but which also takes on the meaning of being born, and the verb *tawude*, which means to find one’s traditional cultural heritage, to have something as a tradition (697). This expression is a common definition in the tradition of West Africa (Bouju 1995: 105, Lassibille 2003: 559, Andrieu 2009: 232).

⁵ The *Fulbe* society is a hierarchical society composed of several social classes: The *Fulbe* Rimbe, who are defined as free nobles – most herders are found in this class; the *Jaawambe*, free with non-noble status, most often merchants and livestock owners; the *Nyeeybe* are caste craftsmen (weavers, cobblers, blacksmiths, wood utensil makers, griots); and the *Riimaybe* are the descendants of the captives of the *Fulbe*, in general associated with agricultural activities. The community of *Fulfulde* speakers is called *pulaaku* in the *Maasina* (Region of the Inner Niger Delta) (Le Marcis 2001: 21–26, de Bruijn and Van Dijk 1995, Breedveld and De Bruijn 1996).

the institutional process of selecting elements for UNESCO promotion is in progress, can produce points of rupture and conflict that have to be investigated.

In the reasoning of institutional heritagization, the choice of elements inventoried seems to have been the act of a small group of men influenced by heritage agents who entrusted them with this task. While the expression *finaa-tawaa* does not reproduce the distinctions between categories of material and Intangible Cultural Heritage, a series of examples separating the heritage constructed by personal ornamentation, poetry or festive practices have enabled heritage agents to indicate the categories of goods concerned in the heritage project. The action plan anticipated the establishment of several structures at different levels in the heritage sequence in order to inventory, document, collect, and finally validate the elements to retain.

The “management sub-committees” created in January 2007 at *Jafaraabe* and *Jallube* were composed at the village level, taking into account criteria defined by UNESCO and the DNPC. They were to include representatives of the community authorities, as well as local cultural and educational associations. Although UNESCO requires the involvement of the population as a whole, the people retained to execute patrimonial activities are primarily literate, male, herd owners, who did not themselves directly participate in Sahelian transhumance. A “regional coordinator,” based in Sévaré,⁶ is responsible for maintaining relations between the two sub-committees and the DNPC. A young *Fulbe* with a degree in geography, he must type up the inventory forms processed by the sub-committees and send them to the DNPC. The Center of Information and Documentation on the *yaaral* and the *degal* that he was supposed to manage has never really existed. A “national coordination committee” was also set up to coordinate regional and local structures. It is composed of DNPC administrators, representatives of UNESCO-Bamako and some Malian political executives working in the area of *Fulbe* cultural promotion.⁷ These structures of supervision and execution of the action plan are composed of individuals who were consulted previously during meetings in preparation for the classification. At the local level, these new institutions extend the power of political authorities already in place and regular intermediaries of other development programs reaching the village level. The participants, in their role as village chiefs, communal councilors and chiefs of cattle herders, are involved in the official organization of festivals and have a reflexive view on the presentation of the tradition. Since their nomination as committee members, confusion has arisen between their task to execute the action plan and their assumed quality as “recognized practitioners of the tradition” or “resource persons.” The action plan should

⁶ City near Mopti, the regional capital.

⁷ These persons are all members of *Tabital Pulaaku*, an international *Fulbe* cultural association. Some offer news in the *Fulbe* language, aired by the ORTM (Office de Radiodiffusion et Télévision du Mali). They are all known by their activities in the cultural domain and have been considered as “resource persons” and intermediaries between the DNPC and village populations from the start of the DNPC initiatives.

have been carried out by this pyramid of participants: Its base is formed by the sub-committees representing the “population” and also “tradition,” and the top is symbolized by the DNPC as the principal link to UNESCO. These different actors all intervene, at different moments and levels, in the cultural heritage definition and selection; they hold different and often contradictory stakes.

3 The Execution of the Protection Plan: Inventory of Intangible Cultural Goods

Actors from the DNPC and UNESCO-Bamako trained the sub-committees and their coordinator in the use of standard UNESCO inventory forms for ICH. The choice of elements to inventory was, therefore, their responsibility, although certain themes or focus areas were mentioned during their training. Feminine esthetics, pastoral competitions, poetry, and festive events constituted the principal elements inventoried (Figure 1). Sub-committee members thus repeated the same elements already promoted by institutional heritage actors either in the candidacy dossier or in the missions carried out at *Jafaraabe* and *Jallube*. Some of these had already been the focus of promotion during official festivals for more than ten years; pastoral competitions had been re-created and clothing to symbolize *Fulbe* cattle herders or women modeled (Leblon 2011a). Only elements taking part in festive contexts are retained. In other words, the inventory reflected the spectacular view of pastoralism and the classic definition of the *Fulbe* identity contained in part in the candidacy dossier. The inventory does not, however, contain elements related to pastoral know-how or the particularities of raising transhumant livestock in the Delta. The dossier thus reduced the scope of patrimonial practices to those visible at the festivals, illustrating the difficulty of nominating a practice that extends across a territory and its transformations. The “cultural space of the *yaaral* and the *degal*” as a place for the expression of pastoral know-how, learning and the transmission of pastoral practice remains unconsidered. This is also true for changes in territorial organization and the role of festive events as institutions of seasonal regulation for access to pastures. Rules for pasture management, precedence of access, the transhumance route, and the mythico-historical recitations attached to them, however, constitute significant parts of the social and cultural knowledge related to these festivals. In effect, changes in the territorial organization of pastoralism (financial instability, precedence not respected) also condition the perpetuity of the festivals. Although the candidacy dossier stressed the ecological and organizational uniqueness of the Delta, this element has barely been taken into account. The dossier presented one of the arguments concerning the pastoral institution from the angle of the cycle of access to pastures, herd displacements and relationships between *Fulbe* cattle herders and the mainly Bozo and Marka sedentary populations at the return of the transhumance. Yet, in the end, the “cultural space” of transhumance is limited to the two moments of the *yaaral* and the

degal, and to the associated esthetic, artistic and festive practices. The intangible, therefore, appears understandable only through the mediation of physical goods that render them more easily comprehensible (Ciarcia 2006: 5). Thus, it is difficult in the process of the institutional promotion of heritage to step some distance away from the spectacular and esthetic aspects of the heritage goods. However, this is necessary to propose an analysis of the real conditions for the production of cultural performances that takes into account the ordinary and conflicting aspects of pastoral practices.

Domain	Elements
Feminine esthetic	<i>Fatoumaji</i> and <i>Jalli</i> braiding, lip tattoos (<i>thioddi</i>), small and large gold earrings (<i>kootone mambé</i> and <i>kootoné pomore</i>), amber beads (<i>allubanaaje</i>)
Cattle herders' attire	The boubou <i>kassa</i> and the hat (<i>tenngaade</i>)
Habitat and house decorations	The grass hut (<i>bugurn</i>), the <i>jongui</i> (set of superimposed calabashes), the plastering of floors and façades (<i>withiungol</i>)
Musical instruments	The flute (<i>serendou</i>), the drum (<i>mbaggon</i>), the <i>bumbutu</i> (overtuned calabashes in another calabash filled with water)
Dance	<i>Noddi-noddi</i> , <i>lasaara degal</i> , <i>bimbere</i>
Stages in the return of the livestock	The <i>Yontere Pondoori</i> (week of Pondori at <i>Jallube</i>), the <i>woulliron</i> (livestock parade at <i>Jallube</i>)
Pastoral competition	Cola nut (<i>goro</i>), slaughtered beef (<i>ngari kirsamani</i>), the coverage of honor (<i>disaare ndanou</i>), pastoral competition (<i>danondiral</i>).
Poetry	A poem in praise of cattle (not included in the final inventory)
History	History of the <i>Jaaral</i> of <i>Jafaraabe</i> (not included in the final inventory)

Figure 1: Summary of the goods inventoried

Source: DNPC 2007, *Rapport final d'inventaire des biens liés à l'espace culturel du yaaral et du degal*, Bamako Ministère de la Culture et DNPC, 62 p; DNPC 2008, *Bordereau d'envoi n°00003/PPSECJD*, Sévaré, DNPC, 15 p.; DNPC 2009, *Bordereau d'envoi n° 00005/PPSECJD*, Sévaré, DNPC, 23 p.

However, the candidature dossier does list elements that threaten the realization of the festivals, such as the lack of succession or taking over the responsibility by younger generations, drought, rural exodus, and the “manque de discipline” among young herders (DNPC 2004: 10-13, DNPC 2007). While this shows awareness and consideration for the proper dynamics of the festivals, it thus breaks with an essentialist definition of pastoral heritage that is also contained within it. However, their role is particularly to legitimize the need for a safeguarding policy by UNESCO classification. Although local and national promoters of heritage are conscious of the real constraints affecting contemporary transhumant pastoralism, it is the esthetic and spectacular aspects that are chosen to meet the expectations of UNESCO regarding patrimonial protection. Finally, the inventory transforms the cultural space into a geographically circumscribed set of promotional elements.

Parameters of places and people consulted defined legitimate frameworks for the production of inventoried data. Sub-committee members consulted “resource persons” in order to document the themes that they themselves had beforehand decided to examine. They consulted cattle herders who had won several pastoral competitions and the best poets of their generation: These are exclusively elderly *Fulbe*. No young herder or young woman had been interviewed, although most of the art forms inventoried concerned their ongoing practices. It was thus the goods as practiced by the *Manbe* (old, elders) and not those practiced today that interested the sub-committee members. The dances, pastoral competitions and the practice of transhumance that they are able to describe would present in this view, forms purportedly more stable or original than the forms actually performed. Moreover, although the candidacy dossier insisted on including all of the socio-professional categories in the region, only the *Fulbe* were consulted. No good inventoried directly concerns any other population in the Delta. The literate members of the sub-committees pointed to the knowledge of the “environment” and “customs” of this part of the population by only surveying the elderly. Thus the committee members placed themselves in a position of learners even though they already knew what they planned to find. Turning to the elders recognizes their pastoral know-how, the role that they may have played in the organization of festivals and their status as elders or notables within the village. Most of the sub-committee members speak and write in French – an ability that the elders lack, but is necessary to prepare the inventory⁸ – and in the process, translate a statement concerning the knowledge of a practice acquired by experience into a patrimonializable object to inventory. These actors chosen as surveyors due to their anchorage in the territory already share a large part of their knowledge with the inhabitants – and they share the social deference and honor given to elders. They are both “porteurs de tradition”⁹

⁸ The forms were not translated into *Fulfulde* and the language of communication with heritage agents is French.

⁹ This expression is borrowed from Gaetano Ciarcia, who used it during the presentation “Imaginaire consensuel du patrimoine à l'épreuve de l'inventaire” at the meeting “Au-delà du consensus patrimo-

and social-status-bound actors within the communities inventoried, which, in turn, also helps to explain why the up-to-date, changing pastoral performances carried out by active, young participants were also neglected by sub-committee members. They had, however, in their biographical journey and professional, political or associative activities, acquired skills that made them “cultural interpreters” (Bierschenk 1995) or “mediators in heritage.”

The position of the coordinator further illustrates how contingent the legitimacy of heritage knowledge has become based on new standards promoted by UNESCO, as applied by the national executing agency. This can be illustrated with data from a workshop for the validation of the inventory held in the city of Mopti in December 2007. Present were members of the two sub-committees, the coordinator and agents from the DNPC, UNESCO-Bamako and “resource persons,” intellectuals, and politicians working in the area of the promotion of Fulbe culture. The heritage inventory is designed to be produced at a local and rural level. During the workshop, the observation was made that some of the elements had been inventoried by the coordinator himself and not by the sub-committees. Both members of the two sub-committees and members of the national coordination committee expressed reservations regarding the quality of information that he could provide. The coordinator, stuck in the city of Sévaré since he had no means available to travel to work directly with the sub-committees, had held his own surveys with people typically recognized for their knowledge of the *Fulbe* world, notably his father, a radio broadcaster in *Fulfulde*, a member of the association for the promotion of *Fulbe* culture *Tabital pulaaku*, and a retired teacher.

Members of the sub-committees were frustrated by the corrections that the young coordinator made to their work. The coordinator, aged 27, had not grown up with the herd and had gone to the city for his education early in his life. He had not been “born into” and had not “found” the herder’s life that would have entitled him to be a legitimate voice within the festivals. Yet members of the sub-committees, even if born in *Jallube* and *Jafaraabe* to families of cattle herders, had not themselves, for the most part, led the livestock in transhumance either. They are *wuronkoobe*¹⁰ and, although a small number had had immediate pastoral experiences, most were teachers or merchants outside the village.¹¹ Nonetheless, they had sufficiently internalized the notion that information gathered in situ was preferable.

nial. Anthropologie des résistances à la patrimonialisation” organized by Cyril Isnart, Julien Bondaz and Anaïs Leblon at MMSH of Aix-en-Provence, November 4-5, 2010.

¹⁰ This term designates the villagers, contrasting with the *Fulbe Wodeebe*, the herders who practice transhumance.

¹¹ Four of the six committee members at *Jafaraabe* are teachers or retired teachers and all have a political or associative responsibility. Only four of the six members at *Jallube* really participated in the inventory. These members included four who are literate in French, two who are teachers and one lawyer at the court of appeals in Mopti. Only one member of each committee has actually participated in transhumance.

Heritage agents (DNPC and UNESCO) and the *Fulbe* intellectuals of the national coordination committee in going over the work of the coordinator emphasized the need for local production of heritage. The ICH relative to the classified space had to be inventoried at *Jafaraabe* and *Jallube*. Actual presence in the territory, and hence, direct experience of the festival was seen as enabling a more “authentic” basis of information than that collected in urban contexts from people sometimes originally coming from the area, but who were now distanced from it in their lives as functionaries or executives.

The “resource persons” of the national committee, not necessarily *Fulbe*, validated the inventory through what is considered their expertise of *Fulbe* pastoral tradition. They are engaged in a more distant reflection of *Fulbe* origins, tradition, history, and culture. Unlike the members of the sub-committees, they no longer live in the village and expound a discourse marked by an intellectualization of the tradition. Some of these participants have European university diplomas and have acquired their knowledge of the *Fulbe* by scholarly research. They often engage in promotional activities for the territory and its cultural identity for political or social ends. They are consulted at the last level of inventory validation in order to reorient the work of the sub-committees and the coordinator, and to advise them on new axes of work. So, after the workshop for the validation of the inventory, these experts asked members of the sub-committees to concentrate on the feminine esthetic, poetry and songs and to “record and transcribe oral traditions and expressions” (DNPC 2007), and also to complete the forms sent with photographs of the elements inventoried. These activities had not been done¹² and the DNPC and the coordinator had countless times denounced the lack of involvement of the sub-committees.

The classification of the “cultural space of the *yaaral* and the *degal*” is the first experience of the DNPC in inventorying ICH entrusted directly to the population and not to technical agents. Some institutional agents in responsible positions experience this demand by UNESCO as a brake on the good success of the project. Part of the urban elite, they enumerate illiteracy, local actors’ interest in financial compensation or even just recurrent stereotypes about a resistant rural context to explain the difficulties encountered in this process of “participatory heritagization.”¹³ Yet, an inventory can only be compiled by building on what festival participants – the very people these elite actors blame for the glitches in the process – actually consider worthy of preservation.

The field observations thus demonstrate that, despite this discursive promotion of a participatory approach, the production of the inventory is highly influenced by international categories that require the participants to rethink their cultural heritage in terms of these categories (material, intangible, natural) and in for-

¹² Only the coordinator and the *Jafaraabe* sub-committee provided additional forms regarding the feminine esthetic or the herders’ material.

¹³ On this point, see Olivier de Sardan (1995: 59–69).

mats (inventory form) that do not map onto the different meanings that the concept of *finaa-tawaa* covers. This logic of inventory, based on the exclusive consultation of the “elders,” especially presents the risk of creating fixed definitions without taking into account the dynamic of transformations. The DNPC, voluntarily or not, involves a village elite while maintaining “l’apparence de la consultation et du consensus” (Le Marcis 2003: 637). The inventory is limited to a few, mostly emblematic aspects that have the merit of presenting easily shared symbols. However, it does not necessarily correspond to the practices and actions that the cattle herders consider as useful to “revive” (*wurtude*) the festivals and pastoralism. In effect, the latter, far from being passive, question the relevance of such an action and discuss what they would like to develop within the framework of this partnership with the DNPC or autonomously.

4 Delays, Misappropriations and Patrimonial Contradictions

The cattle herders have observed a decline in the festivals and pastoralism since the 1970s. The reduction in the number of herds presented in the parades, conflicts within the herder population and lack of respect for precedence of access to pastures are advanced as additional factors that disrupt the smooth running of the festivals. Cultural associations and local authorities, some of which are also members of the management sub-committees, have attempted to reinvigorate the festivals for about ten years by offering prizes to the best cattle herders. Moreover, the herders ask above all for better protection of pastoral activity. They often invoke a sentiment of political, economic or identity marginalization.

Patrimony is commonly perceived as an opportunity to revalorize marginalized territories or activities, particularly through the establishment of tourism. Since its independence in 1960, Mali has thus engaged in a policy of heritage valorization with the aim of promoting an independent state, breaking with the colonial past and ensuring the promotion of the Malian nation (Rowlands 2007: 131). With the advent of the Third Republic in the 1990s, the valorization of Malian heritage had the ambition more directly of reinforcing the program of political decentralization by providing economic resources to the communities (Ouallet 2003a: 69-74, 2003b: 302 and 311, Arnoldi 2006: 64, Doquet 2006). Patrimonial development then appeared as the result of political support for projects. The UNESCO candidacy dossier proposed by the DNPC sets out, in a double movement, the desire for revalorization of the *Fulbe* identity in itself and the inclusion of heritage in the global circuits of consumption of cultural goods. The *jaaral* and the *degai* are presented as being part of a group, adding to the already highly promoted delta of the Niger River and other classified sites in the region: Djenné and the cliffs of Bandiagara.¹⁴ As Gaetano Ciarcia identified for the Dogon Country, heritage in the rhet-

¹⁴ The Malian government proceeded with the inclusion of several sites to the list of World Heritage Humanity: The old towns of Djenné and Timbuktu in 1988 and the Cliff of Bandiagara (Land of the

oric of institutional discourse becomes “a selection of elements deprived of exemplarity, responsible for leading communities into the future and well-being” (2003: 180–181) and a tool in the service of the socio-economic dynamics of the region. In fact, any patrimonial program then appears to be ambiguous in promoting both cultural valorization for itself and the use of culture for the dynamics of local development. Such ambiguities are perceived firstly at the level of the recipients of the patrimonial classification, through the interpretation that they themselves make of it. The question of the translation of the categories of heritage thus goes beyond the level of translating concepts, and reaches into the sphere of concrete expectations related to the development of pastoralism.

The real content of the action plan was presented to the members of the sub-committees and to the coordinator during their meetings with the DNPC, but they only have partial knowledge. They control neither projected action timetables nor the distribution of budgets. For several members of the sub-committees long involved in the organization of the festivals, the intervention of UNESCO via the DNPC had been conveyed as a solution to the difficult financing of the events, to housing problems for the official delegations and, over the long term, was viewed as a possibility to directly subsidize pastoral activity. These ideas were shared with the inhabitants of *Jafaraabe* and *Jallube*, for whom the intervention of an international organization most often meant concrete material productions. UNESCO is generally associated with many other international bodies that intervene in the region of Mopti. Local authorities, mediators and “development brokers” (Bierschenk; Chauveau; Olivier de Sardan 2000) know them, but their focal area, like their function, remains unclear for most of the participants (sub-committee members included).

The classification has brought expectations for the actors in the festivals, but also a certain number of recommendations. These are set out on the levels of project promoters or sub-committee members and of the herders: The latter translate this international awareness as a duty to present fat livestock during the festivals and to take care of the cattle. Patrimonial valorization leads here to an increased surveillance of the herd and responsibilities toward the young herders. This discourse precedes the classification. The change to institutional heritage results only in adding a new dimension to already existing strategies of valorization of pastoralism. While the discourse on the *finaa-tawaa*, held by festival participants and patrimonial agents, makes reference to events, poetry, jewelry, and hair, the discussion of raising awareness of the protection of the festivals comes back to better management of the herd.

Some of the cattle herders interpreted the announcement of classification as an opportunity to aid herding by activities of pasture regeneration, vaccinations and

Dogons) in 1989. The impact of heritage policies in the cities of Djenné and the challenges they raise have been reviewed by Michael Rowlands (2007) and Charlotte Joy (2007). Gaetano Ciarcia (2003) and Anne Doquet (1999) have analyzed the influence of anthropological discourses and tourism in the Dogon culture.

materialization of pastoral infrastructures that UNESCO would directly finance. There is thus a mismatch between the expectations raised by the announcement, the program designed by heritage agents and the pastoralists own view of what should be done to promote their practice.

The goal put forward by UNESCO and the DNPC was, indeed, to reconcile the protection of the “integrity” of the heritage in which the people must be recognized while enabling local development to benefit this population. Up to that point, there is consistency between the DNPC agents, who think in terms of socio-economic development of the zone, and the expectations of the inhabitants of *Jafaraabe* and *Jallube*. It is the modes of realization that occasionally conflict. While festival organizers hope for real investment for the development of the village and pastoralism, institutional heritage promoters think in terms of inventories, documentary acquisition and preservation of knowledge and skills. Both parties are aware that it is the events, jewelry and the competition that interest the international organization, national spectators, some Western tourists, and also the herders, and thus understand the choice of elements targeted by the patrimonial action. Nonetheless, they feel that an intervention focusing on the promotion of the festivals should only concern the pastoral practice in itself. As such, an effective protection program should address security for land tenure, food and the health of transhumant pastoralists.

In other words, the actions promoted by the DNPC are considered inadequate, even incongruous, for most of the inhabitants of the villages involved. The actions of inventory, promotions of musical works or raising awareness by radio programs about the festivals (DNPC 2006) did not meet the expectations raised. This confusion between patrimonial project and development operation has been fostered by the promises made by the political leaders present at the festivities, including the President of the Republic, who announced the realization of a program for regeneration of pasturage or the construction of a vaccination park at the same time as they launched the classification procedure. In the strategies of local authorities, the festivities are already privileged occasions for the community to air grievances to political and administrative leaders present and to meet with potential donors. At *Jafaraabe* in 2008, for example, repair work on the river banks and river dredging were inaugurated during the *yaaraal*. Many local cattle herders thus see the UNESCO classification in this logical series of actions aimed at developing the village or livestock breeding. Some point with pride to the international recognition of the festivals, but they remain skeptical as to its effects. Indeed, even the sub-committee members regard the achievements of the action plan as a failure. For them, UNESCO and the DNPC remain invisible institutions incapable of resolving the pastoral problems with which the local populations are confronted.

5 Conclusion

My research has shown that the cattle herds have been able to divert the classification to evoke their own representations of contemporary pastoralism and to insert it into the interplay of local power and in their negotiations with the central government. Overall, the project as designed by heritage agents has been reworked by different actors once it passed to the actual implementation phase. Whether in institutional patrimonial discourse or in the work undertaken by the organizers of the transhumance festivals, the pastoral competition, the feminine esthetic and the livestock parades are promoted, recycled and reinterpreted. They are transformed into stereotypes that recover their different meanings in a patrimonial arena where the presentation and public reformulation of the tradition carries contradictory political or identity-related objectives. To take only one example of all the possible misappropriations, the patrimonialized festivals can be perceived as tools for the protection of the pastoral exploitation system of the Delta. The classification of the “cultural space of the *jaaral* and the *degal*” then appears as a label that could potentially further land and territorial claims when it is transformed into a symbol of pastoral exclusivity by the cattle herders (Leblon 2011b). Groups of cattle herders might claim rights to maintain pastoral spaces when faced with other cattle herders or other professional groups partaking of the resources the Delta offers.¹⁵ Even symbolic uses of the heritage label could enter into contradiction with other uses, identity-related or political, of the territory as they are operated by the institutional project brought in by the Malian state.

The heritage discourse is couched consensually and placed the accent on the spectacular aspects of pastoralism. In so doing, it avoids involvement in the more conflict-ridden issues concerning modes of management (of a space, a resource, a power).¹⁶ Elements related to the territorialization of pastoral activity, polemic in a context of climate change and redefinition of rights between the different users of the Delta, are neutralized or “camouflaged” behind a consensual presentation of the pastoral tradition. This corresponds both to the UNESCO classification procedure and the guidelines for heritage policy in Mali. Indeed, on the scale of a global patrimonial regime, institutional heritage promoters propose a peaceful

¹⁵ Non-local herders and other socio-professional groups of the Delta have a figurative role in the festivities. Herders foreign to the *leydi* (pastoral territory), farmers and fishermen, even if they are livestock (most often entrusted to a Fulbe breeder who will include them in his own herd) owners, cannot participate in the livestock parades or the competition for the fattest herd reserved for the *Fulbe* herders of the locality. For non-local herders, the exclusion from the festive practice often corresponds to an exclusion from direct rights to the exploitation of the pastures open at the moment of the festivities. Only local herds enter the pastures at Lake *Debboy* during the *degal* at *Jallube*.

¹⁶ The resolution of conflicts between the different actors on the Delta is presented as one of the most pressing challenges to be met for a sustainable management of natural resources in the 5th region by several observers of the Inner Niger Delta (Mosely et al. 2002: 105, Barrière and Barrière 2002).

image of “traditional” society in which conflicts do not exist. With regard to building an architectural heritage classified on the UNESCO World Heritage List, Daniel Fabre has emphasized that:

dans tous les lieux qui seront exhaussés par cette inscription mondiale, nous assistons à une sorte de mise à nu des relations de pouvoir qui débouche, par la force des choses, sur une unanimité négociée puisque la suspension des polémiques, la fraternisation autour du monument est une des conditions de la sélection du dossier. (Fabre 2010: 43)

The harmony of the façade is initially necessary to the classification, since it must be maintained so as not to risk compromising the image of international classification and the benefits it might bestow.

At the Malian national level, the official promotion of ICH cuts across a political issue indirectly promoting sustainable management of natural resources and the different professional activities of the Delta: It defuses conflicting elements that condition, however, the perpetuity of the festivals. It is a rhetorical response brought to the question of sustainable management of natural resources.

The listing of the *yaara* and the *degal* thus comes back to the international imperative of sustainable development and protection of cultural diversity, two themes joined together in the discourse of UNESCO (Stoczkowski 2009). The discourse on patrimony, therefore, offers the possibility for the Malian state to create a synthesis between international norms for patrimonial valorization and the local constraints of a policy of territorial management and development at a time when the state is beginning the transfer of powers to the communities.

My case study dwells on the uniqueness of ICH valorization in what Herzfeld has termed the “hierarchy of global cultural values” (2004). The focus on the involvement of populations concerned allowed me to question facets of heritage protection. The case illustrates the “participatory rhetoric” considered as a key to “good governing” by international organizations (Saint-Lary 2009: 16), while showing, on the ground, how a policy is implemented under the assumption that it opens up opportunities for international donations. The state has been able to implement this nomination while simultaneously withstanding the challenges that pastoral activity represents; they have long been neglected to the benefit of agriculture, though they hold a central economic potential. The state has implemented a heritage discourse here that does not promote herding for itself, but its relationship to the other socio-professional categories along the Niger Delta. Institutional heritagization thus seems to be closer to a short-term project of social development in the deltaic region than an action for promotion of the *Fulbe* culture. Agents entrusted with heritagization invest the past and the *Fulbe* tradition with a mission of ensuring improved living conditions for the people of the Inland Niger Delta. In this, they are joined by villagers who, furthermore, have an interest in the self-

spectacularization of their culture. A specific use of natural resources and land is thus defined from one level to another of the patrimonial nomination ladder.

In a context of decentralization, the passage of the implementation of the project from national to local level also forms part of the process of involving populations at the smallest level of the administrative network. This “increasing localization of projects” (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 1993) implies that actors serve as an interface between project recipients and heritage institutions. In the case studied, the process of involving the populations confirms once again the role of certain actors, political administrators and local associations. Despite the criticisms raised by members of the sub-committees concerning the relevance and utility of the heritage actions undertaken, these critics themselves are not immune to the promotion of the spectacular and esthetic aspects of the patrimonialized goods. They are, however, engaged at different levels in activities promoting pastoralism that have other meanings than simply cultural heritage protection. They can, from now on, extend the work in progress for the presentation of the tradition based in particular on the pastoral competitions and the feminine esthetic (Leblon 2011a). However, in this context, the production of heritage knowledge invokes the power relationships between the state and the pastoral world or between the different inhabitants and exploiters of the Inner Niger Delta.

6 References

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