

## ***Looters or Heroes? Production of illegality and memories of 'looting' in Mali***

Despite a growing interest in criminal networks, research into local art and antiquities traders and diggers remains, with a few exceptions (see Matsuda 1998, Panella 2002, Kersel 2012), almost meagre. At the turn of the twenty-first century, works on the clandestine art trade (Brodie and Tubb 2002, Brodie and Renfrew 2005, Mackenzie 2005, Lane, Bromley, Hicks and Mahoney 2008, Mackenzie and Green 2009, Ulph and Smith 2012) touch only indirectly on the subject of local supply networks. Yet even what small amount of knowledge there is encourages the comparative investigation of illegal contexts, shedding light on the entanglement of local illegal networks with legitimate public agencies, and clarifying the interconnections between the ideal functioning of public administrations and their less transparent and practical involvement in illicit activities (Olivier de Sardan 2009). With those observations in mind, in this paper, I present the results of a detailed investigation into the activities of Malian farmer-diggers and their involvement with the art and antiquities trade, and examine issues arising from their definition and objectification by an officially-mandated discourse structured around national and international policies concerning the recognition and loss of material cultural heritage.

The clandestine nature of the circulation of African art and antiquities constitutes an 'incoherent', even uncomfortable subject of art history, archaeology, and social anthropology alike. In the case of art history, the strong link between stylistic analysis and market valuation in the making of African art and the laundering of stolen objects implies that the study of African material culture has long been connected to commercial interests that envision and depend upon stylistic fixity as an integral component of market confidence (Hardin 1993). The commercial history of African objects, which thanks to international exhibitions was already developing in the 1930s (Corbey 2000, Panella 2002), has thus been obscured by an aesthetic formalism that nevertheless promotes the market. In this sense, the unmasking of the 'commodity chain' that constitutes the trade mechanism for plundered antiquities would include a defetishization of the objects themselves through the demystification of the chain's acts of aesthetic production.

### **The 'looting question' and Malian antiquities**

The 'looting question' as it concerns the looting and illicit trade of Malian art and antiquities is well-developed, and an outline history of looting in Mali is well-established. The circulation of the highly-regarded and thus commercially-valuable ancient terracotta statuettes within the wider art market followed an earlier-established demand for wooden objects that first developed during the colonial period in French Sudan. There are detailed descriptions of official thefts perpetrated during colonial scientific expeditions,<sup>1</sup> in particular the Dakar-Djibouti French expedition (1931-1933) (Leiris 1934). The first discoveries of terracotta

statuettes by French civil servants during levelling works and engineering projects were reported in the colonial literature of the 1940s (Panella 2002: 140-147). Then, starting in 1952, Georges Szumowsky undertook official archaeological excavations at Kami, Nantaka, Fatoma and Kelebere, in the Inland Niger Delta region, where he discovered the products of a rich pottery industry, including globular vases with snakes, funeral jars and top-whorl spindles. As regards terracotta statuettes, however, he stated that ‘unfortunately they are, in general, in private collections’ (Szumowsky 1955: 69)<sup>2</sup>. This statement was also made by UNESCO on the occasion of the ‘experimental project for the inventory of cultural property in Mali’ (Panella 1995: 32). In 1973, archaeologist Michel Parigi proposed the creation of a centre for archaeological research in Mali in order to slow down illicit digging in the Inland Niger Delta (Panella 1995: 32). The undergraduate dissertation in art history by Jacqueline Evrard (Evrard 1977) shows how by the turn of the 1970s the presence of terracotta statuettes within prestigious European private collections, particularly Belgian and French ones, was well established. Between 1971 and 1993, ancient terracotta from the Inland Niger Delta circulated through twenty-one exhibitions, in Europe (seventeen) as well as in the United States (four) (Panella 1994: 211-213).

In the early 1980s, dealer and art historian Bernard de Grunne contributed significantly to market demand by crafting a ‘Djenne’ market logo through his stylistic analysis of the astonishing collection of his father Baudouin de Grunne, one of the five most important collectors of Djenne terracotta in the 1970s and 1980s (De Grunne 1980, 1987, 1988). In spite of his methodological approach, openly contested by academics (McIntosh 1992), De Grunne’s dissertation, published as the catalogue of the exhibition *Terres cuites anciennes de l’Ouest africain* (1980), firmly established the stylistic credentials of a ‘Djenne’ artistic tradition, identifying so-called specific iconographic characteristics, such as, for instance, the well-known ‘multiple eyelashes’. Paradoxically, at the same time, the archaeological campaigns undertaken by Roderick and Susan McIntosh at the end of the 1970s (McIntosh and Keech McIntosh 1979, 1980) and the much publicised discovery of an anthropomorphic statuette without a head (McIntosh and Keech McIntosh 1980) further contributed to the celebrity of the ‘Djenné’ logo and thus the high cultural and market value of the Djenne terracotta statuettes (Panella 2002, 2004, 2011, 2012, 2014).

Informal digging for terracotta statuettes to feed the market developed in the Inland Niger Delta through two phases. The first phase, before the early 1970s, comprised surface collecting. Terracotta were sometimes discovered by Bobo farmers during agricultural work. Several dealers state that by 1975 terracotta statuettes were cropping up out of the soil and that it was very easy to collect them. A wood carver from the village of Koloko (Macina region), for example, remembers that when he was a child, around 1962-1963, he used to go into the bush with his friends looking for terracotta. They were convinced that these statuettes represented ‘Evil’ and they used them for knocking baobab fruits to the ground. The second phase was characterized by extensive digging and the organization of rural teams, partly composed, in the Inland Niger Delta, of Rimaibe seasonal workers (Dembélé 1994). From 1975, digging teams funded ultimately by European collectors through local middlemen and urban dealers became increasingly prevalent. The first official circular specifically forbidding the informal digging of archaeological sites appeared in 1982 but had no real

impact until it allowed the arrest, in 1983, of the president of the Malian art dealers' association, Samba Kamissoko.

### **Cultural heritage, aid conditionality and the emergence of ethics**

The 'looting question' constitutes a world-wide debate that has been strengthened particularly in the last twenty years by the increasing presence of a juridical approach to the circulation of objects recognized as 'cultural heritage' (Tijhuis 2006, Ulph and Smith 2012), as well as by the creation of a 'global hierarchy of values' (Schramm 2000, Herzfeld 2004) that governs the management of cultural heritage. In the early 1990s, cultural heritage became central to the political project of establishing a Malian nation-state, prompting a fight against illegal trade of antiquities, in particular the Djenne terracotta. The creation of a shared national history by the Malian state was intended to construct an interethnic 'social peace' by fusing the past with the present and forging a collective memory (Rowlands 2005), which could have contributed to blunting interethnic confrontation in the country, in particular with regard to the Tuareg conflict in the north (Panella 2012). The failure of structural adjustment programmes during the 1970s and 1980s had motivated a reorientation of international aid toward 'good governance' by promoting the development of a 'national memory' and emphasizing the importance of cultural heritage. After being labelled as masterpieces by the international art market in the 1980s, Djenne terracotta statuettes became intimately involved in the heritization processes<sup>3</sup> which accompanied the national integration policies instituted during President Alpha Oumar Konare's rule (1992-2002). These policies called for stronger campaigns against the illicit excavation of statuettes which caused the negative stereotyping of antiquities' diggers and traders and the creation of the well-known 'plunder phenomenon'.

This first step in the heritization of Djenne terracotta followed the refocusing of official history on the Maninka Sundjata epic and the establishment of the Malian Empire (Jansen 1999). In the 1980s, thermoluminescence dating laboratories boosted the market value of Djenne terracotta by authenticating and providing a historical pedigree for well-known pieces in famous collections (Polet 1990). Most of these statuettes were dated to between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries AD, thus allowing a link to be made between their production and the period of the Malian empire (ninth to sixteenth centuries AD), a fact now well known to the general public (of potential customers). The construction of a national heritage implied a museographic representation of a 'sensory experienced object' (Rowlands 2005) working with a juridical one of ownership and protection. The aesthetic and historical experience created by the international art market thus went hand in hand with a national concept of cultural and juridical 'loss' caused by the outward trade from Mali of Djenne terracotta. The official response to this loss was to devise a situation of illegality that reified the everyday digging of farmer-diggers as looting.

Moreover, it is crucial to consider that this creation of a 'plunder phenomenon' was part and parcel of a more general orientation of aid conditionality, which alongside cultural heritage encompassed poverty reduction, human rights (Cowan, Dembour and Wilson 2001, Englund 2006) and environmental preservation (Glenzer 2002). During the 2000s, the National

Museum of Mali was considered a successful case of cultural good governance and reflected Mali's special role, following its 1992 democratization, as the second African partner of the EU's Development Cooperation Program. The reorientation of international aid toward good governance and 'development from below' came to include the fight against looting. In particular, the media exposure of measures taken to combat the fight against plunder reflected the reorientation of priorities by the World Bank toward the SDA (Social Dimensions of Adjustment), which was launched in parallel with the democratization agenda after the dismissal of President Moussa Traoré in 1991. These new policy orientations in Mali toward cultural development ran in parallel with an internationally developing ethical disapproval of the newly illegal digging, constraining the purchasing policies of museums and affecting their display of looted objects, as well as sharpening the concept of archaeological loss caused by the destruction of archaeological stratigraphy. Archaeologists came to constitute the main flywheel of public and academic discourse on the 'plunder phenomenon' (Tubb 1995, Vitelli 1996, Brodie, Doole and Watson 2000), particularly in African Studies (Togola and Raimbault 1989, McIntosh and Keech-McIntosh 1986, McIntosh, Keech-McIntosh and Togola 1995, Schmidt and McIntosh 1996, Bedaux 1998, Bedaux and Rowlands 2001). In 1996, Peter Schmidt and Roderick McIntosh edited *Plundering Africa's Past*, an overview from an archaeological perspective of the debate over looting. The Malian case is particularly prominent in the book, where 'looters' are presented as poor peasants living in a country where 'any job is a good job'. A journalistic and militant language characterizes this discourse on 'plunder', which is presented as a 'tree of shame' ('the rot that has infested the illicit trade in Malian artefacts') or a 'horrific destruction'.

The manifesto of archaeology engaged against plundering drew upon the object-oriented policy of preservation, truth and access (Merryman 2009), causing urgent calls to stop the illegal digging of archaeological sites, portrayed as 'cultural genocide' (McIntosh 1996). This manifesto embraced a legalist conception of the circulation of objects based on a 'material rhetoric' (Joyce 2002: 137), and relied upon an evidence-based argument drawing legitimacy from a wide range of *corpora delicti* (Panella 2011). From this perspective, visual meaning represents a necessary condition for identifying objects as cultural heritage, as well as constituting a discrimen of their market connotation (as art). Anthropologist Michael Rowlands explains the consolidation of this archaeological vision of cultural heritage by the fact that archaeological data are imbricated in a capitalist system of property relationships. This conservative approach of archaeology thus supports the juridical management of cultural heritage, leading to a territorialization of material culture based upon rhetorics of the past (Rowlands 1998). Consequently, by following the principles of aesthetic valuation and classification incorporated into the visual definition of material cultural heritage, visuality came to be considered as a primary criterion for assessing archaeological and ethnographical objects as juridical ones and consequently as cultural heritage.

In the late 1990s, however, this discursive monopoly of visual materiality was challenged by new considerations of illegal digging taking place within the social contexts of survival economies (Matsuda 1998, Paredes-Maury 1999), developing claims for the 'right to loot' in the name of 'economic justice' (Hollowell 2006), as well as by analysing the trading chains of the clandestine

market (Kersel 2012). In a similar vein, African-oriented postcolonial archaeology began to orient towards the social environments of archaeological excavations and the ethical dimensions of archaeological research (Vitelli and Cowell-Chanthaphonh 2000, Zimmerman, Vitelli and Hollowell-Zimmer 2003, Scarre and Scarre 2006, Schmidt and Karega-Munene 2010).

### **Evidence as truth. *Corpora delicti* and the iconographies of plunder**

The creation of illegality involved in the media presentation of the ‘plunder phenomenon’ prompts analysis of the balance of human and material interests imbricated into the power relations of inequality arising out of the institutional management of cultural heritage. The desert areas of the Inland Niger Delta, contrasting with its tributary flood zone, offer an ideal terrain for the Malian state, leery of adopting the discourse of drought-induced looting developed in a popular article (Togola and Raimbault 1989), to establish its international visibility in the fight against clandestine digging. Consequently the Inland Niger Delta came to represent the official link between drought, poverty and plunder, and cultural development policies were implemented through sensibilization projects in rural villages (Bedaux and Rowlands 2001). This view, based on the contradictory equation poverty = looting, presented farmers at one and the same time as ‘the poorest of the poor’ and as looters, tracing a coherent link between the official landscape of drought and the officially-recognized actors of looting. The rhetoric was mirrored in the iconography of 1990s media images where the diversified social organization of looting and trading networks was obscured behind the media’s simplifying presentation of the salient aspects of looting (illicitness, poverty, and the official reductive view of the Sahel as international symbol of drought), constructing a one-dimensional image of farmer-diggers as prisoners of an inescapable cosmic poverty.<sup>4</sup>

The iconography of plunder as presented in the media was constructed through several *corpora delicti* (human bodies, traces of digging, broken pottery, digging tools) ending in a homogeneous and reified representation of illegality. A photograph published in 1994 by the well-known Belgian journalist Michel Brent (Brent 1994), for example, shows a turbaned farmer and in the background one of the thousands of Inland Delta *toguéré* (plural; *togué*: anthropogenic mound), which are the main targets of village digging teams. A terracotta statuette, a *daba* (small trowel) and a hurricane lamp are in the foreground. The same photo is reproduced on the cover of the book *Plundering Africa’s Past*. An identical iconography is found in another photograph published the same year in *Source Unesco*: a farmer’s face masked by a handkerchief, a terracotta statuette and a hurricane lamp are in the foreground, while the familiar *togué* landscape comprises the background. The fact that the farmers are depicted with hidden faces, work tools at hand, and are described as ‘looters caught red-handed’, accentuates the label of illegality attached to their clandestine digging. The excavation and circulation of terracotta, quite distanced in real time from the moment of their publication, are fixed by media images of the evidence of looting in the space/time of the ‘ethnographic present’. This iconography eradicates the socio-temporal context of digging while emphasizing an extended and flattened temporality. By producing a homogeneous and timeless scenario of illegality, it eclipses the intellectual and emotional problematics of farmer-diggers engaged in

survival strategies and discourages more nuanced engagements with their own ideas of identity. In the following sections, drawing upon ethnographic interviews conducted as part of my PhD research into clandestine digging, I will explore these emic conceptions of identity and show how they act to constitute the self-representation of a 'heroic' ethic, drawing upon values of knowledge, endurance, risk and marginality. The self-conception of 'hero' stands in stark contrast to the official portrayal of 'looter'.<sup>5</sup>

### **The real life of the 'looting question': biographies from the ground**

Aside from the timeless landscape of the 'plunder phenomenon' depicted internationally, the social life of the Djenne terracotta can be modelled by individual trajectories.<sup>6</sup> Exemplifying the diggers active in the Inland Niger Delta from the 1970s to the 1990s was Satimbé<sup>7</sup>, a key contact for my PhD fieldwork. From 1970 to 1990, Satimbé was digging throughout almost the entirety of the ancient habitat of the Mopti region, through most of the Djenne area and some of the San area. During his long career, he has worked as cliff-climber robber, farmer-digger, team-chief, and middleman. He was one of the rare diggers who received large sums of money cash-in-hand after undertaking digs for famous European collectors and who would haggle over the price of statuettes with Malian urban dealers.

At the end of the 1950s, Satimbé was a farmer in his village in the Dogon countryside. Around 1958, when he was in his thirties, he started work as a prospector for a Sarakole dealer to whom he would sell wooden objects for between 100 and 500 MF each (the price of a goat), that the dealer would then export to Burkina Faso. The first object Satimbé sold the dealer for 500 MF was a wooden Dogon horseman. When the Sarakole dealer came back from Burkina, he offered Satimbé a commission for 5000 MF. Satimbé used to go to the rock wall with scaffolding and a rope allowing him access to the inside of the cliff. Thanks to his mastery of the Bandiagara Cliffs as well as to his courage, he became an incomparable prospector of Tellem, and more generally, wooden objects. At a time where tourism was not so developed in the Dogon country, people feared Tellem objects, unlike Dogon sculpture), so that only a limited number of prospectors specialized in their collection. From 1958 to 1970, Satimbé prospected only 'woods'. After 1970, however, he stated that very good wooden pieces started to become rare.

Satimbé saw ancient terracotta statuettes for the first time in 1968 at a stall in the Mopti *Grand Marché*. The owner of the stall was selling finds from surface collecting to visiting Europeans. It was at this time that Satimbé started collaborating with Drabo, a dealer who had just settled in Sevaré. In 1968, Satimbé went to Sevaré to sell a group of objects and met Drabo, who was very interested in buying them. Nevertheless, Drabo could not afford the 300.000 MF that Satimbé was asking and he proposed instead going to Bamako to sell them. Satimbé accepted this offer, and after Drabo's return he received his requested price of 300.000 MF (which must mean that Drabo had sold the group for much more than 300.000 MF). At this time, Drabo was not familiar with the region and he was lacking prospectors, so he asked Satimbé to work with him, especially to obtain wooden sculptures from the Dogon cliffs. One of Drabo's most important customers, a Belgian collector, was able to give Dolo (the most important dealer

for Satimbé in the Mopti region) and Satimbé 50 million MF to fund the acquisition of high quality wooden pieces. Thus the demand for terracotta first developed within this wider and more prestigious market of wooden objects, and several rural middlemen shifted into the terracotta market. For instance Souleymane started as a wooden objects dealer in 1970, trading at Bankass, Sevaré and Bandiagara, where he was settled, especially supplying Mingali, Sangha, Dourou, Kendié and Kani Bozo. He sometimes bought new replica pieces that he would artificially age in order to sell them to urban dealers in Bamako. Starting in 1975, the first digging teams started to be established. Satimbé stated that some teams had already appeared in 1968 but that he himself had only started to work as a digger of terracotta in 1970, when he dug a site between Sevaré and Mopti. He found his first terracotta on the second site he dug, in the area of Djemandaka.

### *The social organization of the chain*

Diggers work in teams. The team chief is the central point of the digging universe.<sup>8</sup> He works for a dealer, a rural or an urban one, who covers costs (work tools, wages, accommodation, food, and also cigarettes and drugs); he can also work for himself, as Satimbé did, by offering discoveries to associated dealers. The team chief is responsible for every step of the digging chain: recruitment, allocation and supervision of tasks, food provisioning, selection of discoveries, prices, and wages. Recruitment of diggers is free of costs and in most cases it takes place through personal networks.<sup>9</sup> Members of the same family sometimes constitute a team and work together<sup>10</sup>; however, this is not a general rule. One of Satimbé's sons as well as his brother worked in different areas between Tokonti, Niakongo and Sinaré, while other sites have been dug by Satimbé's best diggers.

The mounds comprising archaeological sites are exploited by two main techniques: opencast digging and shaft digging, often with a mix of both. Opencast digging involves the use of pick-axes to open sections to a depth of one meter and width of two or three meters. Situated at each end of an exposed section, two experienced diggers establish the rhythm of work for newer recruits placed in between. The harmony of the team depends on these two experienced flank workers. They advance the section by pick or by hoe and collect objects as they appear in the soil, before increasing the section's depth.

Shafts can reach down as far as ten meters. Diggers cut a four by three metre shaft down to archaeological levels and then open galleries into rich artifact deposits. In contrast to opencast digging, this technique depends upon the presence of two to three teams, the first one for digging at depth, the second one for removing spoil. Objects are collected by a third team, at first during digging and then by sorting through spoil. The horizontal galleries opened by diggers are potentially dangerous because of the poor consistency of sediments. Tree roots, air pockets and burrows can crack the foundations of a mound causing its collapse. In 1990 a digger died when a tunnel collapsed on the Na Tomotowa site, 5 km south-west of Thial (Tenenkou). Diggers had begun their work mid-March after a villager had made an unexpected discovery (Dembelé 1990). Immediately, neighbouring villagers began to dig for objects to sell to regular customers who used to come to the weekly market. Dolo was at Thial. He speaks about 'a lot of

people' digging galleries perpendicular to a baobab's roots, ten to fifteen meters deep. He considered this technique to be very dangerous because the roots could have weakened the consistency of the soil. The accident drew the attention of the authorities to the dig where almost two hundred people were working. It is interesting to notice that this event, one of the most talked about 'catches' of 'looters' in the media, has also been one of the most important elements of a memory of risk for the Inland Niger Delta's farmer-diggers. In parentheses, considering the repetitive mentions of these and other arrests and object seizures in international discourse over 'looting', it is interesting to note that the 1983 the arrest of Samba Kamissoko mentioned above attracted no international media coverage whatsoever, even though he was the most powerful hub of the outward trade of terracotta and an unavoidable boss for teams operating in the Delta and the south.

During excavation, the interpretation of archaeological remains and of the position and distribution of objects, lead to a better understanding of the site. Terracotta statuettes are never found buried individually, they comprise specific caches. At Sare Bedari, for example, Satimbé discovered, at a depth of 1.50 metres, two anthropomorphic statuettes, comprising a pair of wrestlers and an old man in a meditating position, only 1 metre apart. At Sare Seni he found seven anthropomorphic terracotta near each other. Diggers often dig at the foot of a tree, which is considered a favourable location for discovering possible caches. At Toguere Saga and Toguere Tamba (in the environs of Djenne), six of the seventeen shafts opened by diggers were located close to trees. According to the diggers, the presence of anthropomorphic terracotta statuettes is often heralded by a *manidaga* ('the statuette's pot'), a small pot, usually globular and decorated with snakes, that is often found close to terracotta statuettes. Satimbé's favorite technique was frontal excavation by trenches which allowed him to discover unusual object deposits surrounded by vessels or caches from an alignment of *manidaga*. For instance, Satimbé remembered caches at Mankama where a small shaft (1x2 m) revealed the following stratigraphy (numbered according to depth from top to bottom):

1. *manidaga* level
2. slabs of stone level
3. *manidaga*
4. terracotta statuettes (30 pieces)

Manidaga can be considered as 'pilot-objects', and are found on the surface as well as at depth. The significance of *manidaga* represents the first 'secret' that Satimbé passes to his best diggers. The size of a pot can vary from one site to another: from 20 cm diameter in Diamori sites to those described as 'enormous' found in 1973 at Sahona. According to Satimbé, *manidaga* would always be proportional to the size of surrounding statuettes. Although most *manidaga* were found close to statuettes their function remains unknown; moreover, their position can be changed by soil movement, erosion or surface disturbance by cattle, compelling diggers to widen their search zone. Sometimes, soil movement causes discoveries of *manidaga* only. Another pilot-object guiding excavation is a cylindrical piece with horizontal flutings. It was two years before Dolo showed me an example; he told me that he commonly saw this type of cylinder in the proximity of statuettes. Only a few people knew about such a marker. He had no

idea of its function and, to my knowledge, no archaeological publication concerning looting in the Inland Niger Delta has reported them.

### **Memories of the heroes: Secrecy, marginality and loneliness as ethical values of 'looting'**

Satimbé and the members of his team consider mastery of digging techniques to be an ethical value. 'Sniffing out' a good cache requires experience, patience and endurance. As regards endurance, ethics of physical suffering are a major *leitmotiv* of West African farmer cultures, of which the Senufo culture is probably one of the best known (Lemaire 2009), incorporating overlapping narratives of physical endurance and solitary risk-taking (Hellweg 2006). The well-known Maninka story of the Do's buffalo, mentioned in the Sundjata epic (Jansen 2000), is an outstanding example in this context of the relationship between risk, marginality and loneliness as a source of physical suffering and thus endurance. It is important to notice too, aside from suffering, that the two main elements comprising the ideal character of a Maninka hunter, the *kèya* (assumption of responsibility) and the *suya* (occult knowledge) (Camara 2010), also reflect ethical values of the diggers, especially of the team chief, in relation to the choice of digging on dangerous sites and violating ancient burials.

As well as values of risk, endurance and loneliness, political marginality is a common condition of many actors involved in illegal and/or dangerous activities, as well as in political and economic resistance, such as miners (De Boeck 2001, Werthmann 2001, 2003, Grätz 2003, 2009, Panella 2007, Cuvelier 2011), guerrilla soldiers (Ferme and Hoffman 2003), artisans (Herzfeld 2004), and migrants (de Latour 2003). In Mali, artisanal gold miners represent a cogent group for comparative analysis of the relationships between marginality, trust, risk and self-representations of the hero, as farmer-diggers and gold miners share systems of knowledge in relation to buried objects. Firstly, accessing the underground world requires protection and propitiatory rituals for both miners and diggers, such as sacrificing a red cock or sharing red cowries as well as marabout services. Sacrifices allow work to proceed under the watchful eye of the *djiins* (bush spirits). Gold miners and looters both provide rich narratives about dangerous night encounters with bush spirits. Secondly, diggers consider burglary and the accumulation of gold and ancient objects as activities that are cursed because of their relation to 'hot money'. Hot money is thought to be cursed because it is derived from individual and rapid accumulation (Goedefroit 2001, Walsh 2003) and not from slow accumulation through saving in a farming context. That is why both gold and ancient objects have to be sold as soon as possible after their discovery. Thirdly, farmer-diggers and gold miners accept risk as proof of courage. For the miner, major risks are posed by collapsing galleries and mercury poisoning; farmer-diggers have to cope with thirst and hunger. In southern regions of Mali they also have to face dangerous animals such as boas and sometimes panthers. Fourthly, because they work in dangerous environments, gold miners and farmer-diggers adhere to a code of sharing and practice a strict allocation of tasks according to experience. It is to be noticed also that in southern regions farmers switch between digging, gold mining and cotton growing, thus bridging three major activities of Malian rural life that share ethics of physical endurance and team spirit. Significantly, the Maninka term *sinbon* indicates both the most

courageous hunter and the most productive farmer. Last but not least, farmer-diggers as well as artisanal gold miners are liminal actors. They belong to their community while engaged in activities that require secrecy in relation to officialdom and their home villages alike, across different ethical frames arising out of their ambiguous social status. For centuries, gold mining has been a common seasonal activity of Maninka farmers, nevertheless, a growing number of artisanal gold miners no longer cultivate the fields, entirely devoted instead to the search for gold. That is why, in spite of their risk-taking, they are considered as lazy people because they don't support household food security. In their turn, the practice of farmer-diggers of digging on burial sites is absolutely frowned upon by Muslim communities. This partly explains why several villages in the Inland Niger Delta refused to provide food and help to farmer-diggers or to participate in digging.

### **Cartographies of affect. Mapping plunder in the Inland Niger Delta through the eyes of Satimbé**

In narratives of heroization, the dynamics of corporeality manifest themselves through the emergence of a poetics of digging constructed around an emic memory of places.<sup>11</sup> Farmer-diggers recall a shifting emotional cartography, one that is distinct from the material-based archaeological cartography of looted sites. The locations of terracotta sources are fixed in memory by the quality and quantity of their contents, the social relations (between teammates or neighbouring villages) involved in their discovery, and mostly, the hardships faced during the dig. One-man digging is the ultimate and poetic proof of manliness among those illegally digging ancient sites. Satimbé offers a striking example of such an intimate geography of looting. At Fatoma, Satimbé worked alone for as long as two years; near Sare Seni, he found seven terracotta, gathered together in just one hole. He carried them on his head and shoulders as far as Mopti, where he sold them to a trusted dealer. Satimbé also recalls his ordeal at Sahona, because of the fact that during the dig there he had no money. He was forced to feed himself on two-year-old hides that he immersed in water for two hours before cooking them for 14 to 19 hours (his statement). The death of diggers from hunger, thirst and accidents are frequent, and death is a constituent element of the poetics of looting and rhetorics of resistance. The famous Khun Ram, sold in 1991 at Sotheby's for \$ 275,000, is known mostly because of a quarrel over its authenticity (Brent 2001). In his recollection, however, Satimbé emphasized instead the fact that during the transport of the Khun Ram to Bamako, the vehicle carrying it capsized, and the driver died (Panella 2002). Satimbé also gave cogent information on the biographies of some of the most famous terracotta which were circulating in the 1980s through western museums, art galleries and private collections. For instance, he meticulously described the internationally known 'fighters' he claimed to have discovered at Sare Bedari and Sahona and in the former Philippe Guimiot's private collection as well as the 'lovers' he says he excavated at Kakabougou and sold to Baudouin de Grunne, Guimiot's father-in-law (Panella 2002). For Satimbé, Sare Bedari marks the golden age of his life. This site was one of the richest with regard to the number and quality of terracotta excavated, as well as to their sale prices. At the same time, the physical and

mental endurance of Satimbé and his team was sorely tried at this site because they worked in almost complete isolation, far removed from the nearest village.<sup>12</sup>

Comparison of archaeological mapping that emphasizes material remains with the memory-oriented mapping of ethnography yields radically different perspectives for the analysis of looting. My colleagues and I have tried to compare the results of archaeological survey undertaken by Malian and Dutch archaeologists on plundered sites in the Inland Niger Delta between 1989 and 2002 (Dembélé, Schmidt and van der Waals 1993, Bedaux, Dembelé, Schmidt and van der Waals 1994, Schmidt 2010) to the results of my own fieldwork on digging memories in the same region (Panella 2002). The comparison uncovered differences in 28 per cent of cases. In particular, 3 per cent of the sites discovered by archaeological survey, which include Saré Male and Djambougou, seem to have been completely plundered, while the ethnographic research did not find any memory of important digging there. For the remaining 25 per cent of cases, the ethnographic research points to large-scale digging, while the archaeological survey suggests only occasional or even a complete absence of digs. It should be born in mind, however, that archaeological survey is more time-limited than ethnography, and it is possible that traces of digging on these sites have been erased by subsequent erosion.

Ethnographic survey also allowed the grouping of sites in relation to given typologies of objects. Zoomorphic terracotta from Djenne, for example, are comparable to those from Pondori. Additional comparison concerns typologies. First of all, multiple (notables, warriors, marabouts, ‘captives’) or singular iconography: sites surroundings Djenne have given up the largest number of ‘notables’ (masculine characters with rich garments and coiffures as well as fine scarifications). ‘Horsemen’ sites are: Sahona, Tou, Kobaka, Nataka, Ngomi, Mégou and Bambarawel (Kakabougou). Bambarawel is the richest site for equestrian ensembles (Panella, Schmidt, Polet and Bedaux 2005: 18-20). ‘Horsemen’ have been amongst the most expensive pieces on the market as well as the most widely reported in the media. Information provided by farmer-diggers indicates a rich iconographic variety in the Inland Niger Delta. It is undeniable that such data are collected in a shifting context during fieldwork: contingent trust relationships, scanty and fragmented information, intervals between interviewing and collecting as well as digging. Nevertheless, farmer-diggers have linked specific iconographies to individual sites and they have recognized several well-known terracotta, now belonging to western museums and circulating in temporary exhibitions (Panella 2002, 2004), revealing details about discovery, outward trade, and western customers.

### **Loss as memories of making**

Mastery in discovering pieces constitutes an important element of a digger’s identity. During our conversations, they would proudly describe to me assemblages of a given terracotta or famous objects that they had excavated and sold. The majority of diggers perceive the earlier periods of digging as the golden age of their life. Moreover, between the early 1970s and early 1980s, digging ancient sites was not forbidden and they were working freely and openly. Old diggers perceive their retirement from digging as the hardest moment of their life because of the loss of technical and intuitive skills as well as decline in income.

Contrary to most farmer-diggers in the south, farmer-diggers in the Mopti and Djenne region, especially team chiefs and rural middlemen, have been handling large sums of money because of the better organization of the outward trading chain. Money becomes an ethical domain to the extent that it materializes physical pain and risk. One of the reasons why diggers are disappointed by the high resale prices asked of 'their' terracotta by urban dealers is that the dealers have not taken any risks in searching for and excavating the objects. Thus following an opposed ethical landscape, diggers develop a subjective design, by perceiving a final parting from the real time of digging activities and carrying on a feeling that can be related to the temporal dimension of nostalgia based on individual moral harmony, and spelt out through the values of risk acceptance, endurance, and sharing.

Such narratives of the 'hero' recognized among diggers thus constitute an alternative view to the one produced by the material and juridical vision of loss incorporated in the object-oriented approach to material heritage. The panel discussion entitled 'Dynamics of Social change and Intangible Cultures – a Paradoxical Dialogue', organised for the first European Conference on African Studies (SOAS, London, 2005) by Danielle de Lame and myself, stressed the need to re-think the concept of loss that UNESCO applies to so-called endangered intangible heritage. Discussion went so far as to consider that the concept as it is conceived by UNESCO does not apply to the intellectual and emotional investment in economic subsistence strategies, such as digging in Mali, thereby determining a discrimination in value between the conceptions of cultural products and the acts of cultural production. In other words, it does not envisage a total reading of the cultural facts in relation to the dynamics of sustainability and reproduction at work in contemporary societies. Stuart Kirsch has proposed a compelling overview on plays of the concept of cultural property by stressing the difference between belonging and possession and by defining property as a "way of knowing" (Kirsch 2001). These perspectives also concern the current debate in the social sciences over 'critical heritage' (Harrison 2013) with regard to emotion and affect. That is why it would be worthwhile for social research to consider the acts of production imbricated into physical, local, ethical and individual perceptions of 'loss' through a view other than the one of the official, global, transferable and object-oriented norms of institutional actors of cultural heritage.

## Conclusions

In this paper, I have tried to analyse the dichotomy created between Djenne terracotta statuettes and their acts of production by the political agenda of cultural heritage policy in the Inland Niger Delta, and realised through the confrontation of opposed value systems. While keeping the government policies of cultural heritage management as a background context, I concentrated on the confrontation between the material object-oriented approach of official actors, with its production of illegality, and the poetics of suffering and risk nourished within the invisible interstices of those cultural policies. I showed that the circulation of ancient terracotta has entailed challenges of visibility, so that presenting cultural heritage has to deal with its representation, and therefore with museography, scenography and architectural vision, consonant with a 'material rhetoric' imbricated into the visual frame. It was in line with the Malian state's pursuit of

the international recognition of a ‘global hierarchy of values’. The ‘bottom-up’ approach adopted in this paper has revealed the contrast between the homogeneous vision of official sources as regards ethics (state, international organizations) and market pedigree on one side, and the fragmented and contradictory trajectories of individual ethics and choices on the other side. In particular, the dynamics of the creation of cultural heritage policies presented above show that in political arenas the principle of visibility is applied to objects and to farmer-diggers as the debate on plunder is at the same time *raison d’être* and tool of perennialization of international debate on cultural heritage and its object(s). In this context, the debate over the looting of archaeological sites has become a reiterative product of national rhetorics of legality and illegality opposed to narratives of marginality and self-representations of heroism adopted by ‘illegal’ actors. The heroic transfiguration processes that I have illustrated reveal the imbalance of relations that are at stake in national policies regarding the creation and preservation of cultural heritage in Mali and more generally the world. Inequalities generated by the global values of cultural heritage materialize more general dynamics of reification and commodification of objects and human beings (Vandenberghe 2002) as they are caught up in a neo-liberal and media-oriented vision of culture built upon visibility. It is important to remember that the commodification of the Djenne terracotta developed hand in hand with their heritization by the Malian state. Thus, while conferring cultural heritage status on Djenne terracotta, the art market not only objectified the items themselves, but also the people involved in the local trade networks, in particular the farmer-diggers, as looters – as illegal actors. The case of Djenne terracotta thus shows the dynamics of authentication occurring in contexts of accelerated commodification where the divide between objects and persons is blurred (Van Binsbergen 2005). In this sense, farmer-diggers could be considered as ‘shadow groups’, on the one hand because of an economic and symbolic non-visibility inherent to the mechanisms of cultural heritage production and circulation and on the other hand because of their collective identification with resistance to the state as illegal actors.

Perceived by the state as its discourse implies, either as criminals or in a paternalistic light, farmers are perceived as basking in an immanent poverty. The World Bank’s choice of words – ‘the poorest of the poor’ – seems merely to conform to the state’s position regarding the drought and its perception of ‘looters’. Despite the participative approach to cultural development, such policies finally erase the daily life of rural actors by perpetuating a dichotomy between urban elites and the hinterland, as well as an impoverished vision of the categories at stake in the social arena of the antiquities trade.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1914 the ethnologist Arnold van Gennep claimed against the massive importation of African objects from the continent: “Some expeditions as that of Leo Frobenius made off with thousands of objects from Western Africa and Congo to the point that indigenous workshops of several tribes have disappeared. What a strange way to drive science forward” (van Gennep in Laude 1990).

Translation from French is from the author.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview over the postcolonial archaeological research in the Inland Niger Delta between the 1960s and the 1990s see Panella 2002: 149-154). The concentration of North American, Dutch and French archaeological projects in the Inland Niger Delta (Bedaux et al. 1978, McIntosh and Keech-McIntosh 1980, Bedaux et al. 2005), and the fact that the first available information on local networks referred to it, attracted greater media attention to the Mopti and Djenné regions than to southern ones, such as Bougouni and Sikasso, which yet were equally affected by the unearthing of ancient statuettes (Panella 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Heritage studies consider the ‘heritization processes’ as the transformation of material and immaterial culture in ‘cultural heritage’ through a political selection of given historical and aesthetic values.

<sup>4</sup> I presented a first paper on the link between conditionality policies and the fight against plunder of archaeological sites in Mali during the 2008 ASA Annual Meeting Conference (Chicago, 13-16 November 2008): ‘The ‘capital-pillage’ and the Fight Against Poverty in Mali’.

<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, some considerations make it difficult to automatically dismiss the notion that poverty equals pillage. During the 2004-2005 drought, Djenné (Mopti region, the outpost of the ‘North’), an essential hub of the terracotta’s traffic during the 1980s, was one of the cities that benefited from the World Food Program’s distribution of rice. However, in the years 1994, 2001 and 2006, the monetary poverty rating of the east-southern Sikasso’s region, the ‘grenier du pays’, shifted between 85% and 81% whereas the northern region Tombouctou/Gao/Kidal was shifting between 58% and 29% (Delarue et al. 2009). Despite these evidences, in 2004, rural development funds allocated to the ‘poor’ north were much greater than those to the Sikasso region. Moreover, Namaké, a wealthy farmer from Bougouni area (Sikasso region) described digging at ancient sites as one of his routine seasonal activities, in addition to gold washing and cotton-farming . When I asked him whether he did any digging during the severe drought of 1983-84, he answered yes, specifying that however the drought did not influence his choice to search for terracotta.

<sup>6</sup> Data on rural actors presented in this article are issued by my dissertation thesis (Panella 2002: 169-187). Nevertheless, they have never before been published in English.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Satimbé’ and the names of the other rural actors are pseudonyms. Information on the social organization of teams presented in this article mainly come from the testimony of Dolo, a rural dealer settled in the Mopti region, from the core-group of his main digging team (the core of which is composed by four diggers), as well as from Satimbé.

<sup>8</sup> The Bandiagara Cliffs are a sandstone chain (over 200 km) marked at its end by the Hombori Tondo. Presumably Tellem people have been living in the Bandiagara Cliffs (in particular, Sangha region) between 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. They extinguished after epidemics and droughts. Between 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Dogon left the Mande region, in the south, and migrated toward Sangha (Bedaux 2003: 37).

<sup>9</sup> Recruitment of women is not included and diggers are never accompanied by their spouses. Farmers-diggers are used to work on ancient sites very far from their village, what constitutes a major difference with regard to teams working in southern regions of the country (Panella 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Dembelé, 1994: 401.

<sup>11</sup> I presented a previous analysis of the cartography of affect imbricated into clandestine digging during the ASA Annual Meeting, (New Orleans, 17-21 November 2009) in a paper titled: ‘Heroes and Looters as ‘imagined communities’. Narratives from the Margins and the Creation of Illegality in the Rhetoric of Malian Cultural Heritage’.

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