PRESERVING AFRICA THROUGH AFRICA?
LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND ENDOGENOUS CHALLENGES IN CONSERVATION

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SITUATED CONSERVATION: RETHINKING AFRICAN TANGIBLE HERITAGE

African tangible heritage, largely preserved in museums inherited from the colonial era, presents specific challenges. These works, often made from natural materials such as wood, plant fibers, or clay, do not always respond well to standardized Western conservation methods. In response to these limitations, artists and artisans are developing locally adapted knowledge rooted in their environments. This research is part of a situated conservation approach, which seeks to reanchor preservation practices within their cultural, social, and ecological contexts.

In what ways do cultural and ecological contexts shape textile conservation practices in Senegal?



METHODOLOGY

I adopt an approach based on:
- Ethnographic immersion
- Listening to vernacular knowledge
- Analysis of local craft practices

CASE STUDY

The dyer Aida Fané, based in Saint-Louis, Senegal, employs indigenous plants such as *khas* and bay leaves to ensure durable color fixation on fabrics. In parallel, Mai Diop, a collector of historical textiles, uses the same botanical resources to protect fabrics from moisture and insect damage.



RESULTS

- The systematic documentation of orally transmitted knowledge reflecting intergenerational transmission of conservation related practices.
- The identification of non-institution modes of preservation, often embedded in everyday artisanal and domestic contexts.
- The observation of a profound interdependence between textile practices, the natural environment and familial memory, particularly in relation to plant-based resources.



CONCLUSION

The situated conservation approach advocates for the reintegration of preservation practices within their cultural, social and environmental contexts, in contrast to standardized and decontextualized methods. Drawing on field-based research, this approach demonstrates that collaborating with local communities enhances the effectiveness of conservation efforts, while also highlighting indigenous knowledge system and traditional forms of governance that are often overlooked in conventional frameworks.

Image credits: Bienvenu Seck (top right), Cécile Mendy (middle left, middle right, and bottom centre)

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