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# Indigenous Curation at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science

## Abstract

This thesis explores the questions of how and why indigenous curation is incorporated into collections care and management for American Indian sacred, ceremonial, and religious items at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS) through the examination of staff discourse. This thesis also discusses the importance of incorporating non-Western ontologies and epistemologies into classically Western science and natural history museums, and how this helps reconcile differing collections care and management practices. Through the presentation and examination of data and literature, I argue that it is important to include indigenous curation in museums because it aids in cultural revitalization and reclamation for Native Americans, and that incorporating indigenous curatorial methods and alternative ontologies and epistemologies aids in the decolonization process in museums. This argument is presented through a case study of the Anthropology Department at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science

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INDIGENOUS CURATION AT THE DENVER MUSEUM OF NATURE AND  
SCIENCE

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Julia M. Strunk

November 2016

Advisor: Richard Clemmer-Smith, Ph.D.

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Title: INDIGENOUS CURATION AT THE DENVER MUSEUM OF NATURE AND SCIENCE

Advisor: Richard Clemmer-Smith, Ph.D.

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### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the questions of how and why indigenous curation is incorporated into collections care and management for American Indian sacred, ceremonial, and religious items at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS) through the examination of staff discourse. This thesis also discusses the importance of incorporating non-Western ontologies and epistemologies into classically Western science and natural history museums, and how this helps reconcile differing collections care and management practices. Through the presentation and examination of data and literature, I argue that it is important to include indigenous curation in museums because it aids in cultural revitalization and reclamation for Native Americans, and that incorporating indigenous curatorial methods and alternative ontologies and epistemologies aids in the decolonization process in museums. This argument is presented through a case study of the Anthropology Department at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

If you're in anthropology in a natural history [museum] setting you have...you're having to argue with people who handle rocks and leaves and lizards and whatever, and they don't understand why you have these special requirements [for collections] but you're sitting there going 'I'm talking to a real, live person. I have real, live people coming in and telling me about their things'. (Isabel Tovar, Personal Interview September 17, 2015).

During the summer of 2015, I began research at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS) in the Anthropology Collections department. I set out to understand why and how the staff members of this department incorporate indigenous curatorial methods for American Indian sacred, ceremonial, and religious items into their collections care and management practices. Indigenous curation includes non-western models of museums, curatorial methods, and concepts of cultural heritage preservation (Kreps 2009, 194). In a large nature and science museum, or "natural history setting" such as the DMNS, curatorial methods and concepts of preservation tend to be somewhat uniform, sterile, and favor preservation of knowledge in perpetuity in Western ontological and epistemological frameworks. Natural history and science museums in the United States exist as repositories for objects and knowledge for visitors to access at will. What happens when material culture from people of non-Western cultures enters these institutions? And furthermore, when one takes into account the historical context of how

and why these pieces of material culture (and human remains) were collected, the answer to this question is far from simple.

The DMNS is a large museum in Denver, Colorado. It houses 1.5 million objects, and the new (2014) addition alone contains five floors and is 126,000 square feet. In addition to the Anthropology collection, the museum houses collections from the fields of Zoology, Earth Sciences (Geology, Paleontology, Paleobotany), and Health Sciences. There is also an education collection, a conservation center, museum archives, library, and space sciences lab. The institution displays both permanent and temporary, traveling exhibitions, and served 1.7 million people in 2015 (Denver Museum of Nature and Science 2016, 2)

At the outset of this research, I assumed that the DMNS would be including indigenous curatorial methods into their collections care and management because of its reputation as a museum, and the work of one of their curators, Chip Colwell. In *Memory Pieces and Footprints*, Colwell and Ferguson present a multivocal approach to archaeology and “...argue for a middle path that simultaneously embraces multivocality and seeks an objective understanding of the world” (2010, 149). They examine archaeological sites through multiple frameworks of knowledge and discuss “‘alternative archaeologies’, which seeks to place people into the past, to employ a wider range of methodologies, to explore the mechanisms dominant in history, and to alter the political economy of scholarly research” (2010, 159). It seemed natural that as a curator, Dr. Colwell would also be welcoming of “a wider range of methodologies” in the care of material culture housed at the DMNS. Additionally, a University of Denver thesis written by Rachel Maxson and published as a DMNS Annal with Dr. Colwell and Hopi Cultural

Advisor Lee Wayne Lomayestewa argues that their project undertaken at the DMNS to correctly rename Hopi Katsinam in the Anthropology Collections is an example of what Christina Kreps outlines as “appropriate museology” (Kreps 2008), which creates “more culturally appropriate and sensitive collections. Incorporating Hopi terms, spellings, and meanings would bring collections management closer to indigenous curation” (Maxson et al. 2011, 23). Kreps’ definition of appropriate museology is “...an approach to museum development and training that adapts museum practices and strategies for cultural heritage preservation to local cultural contexts and socioeconomic conditions” (2008, 26). These examples of how the Denver Museum of Nature and Science seemed to be incorporating culturally appropriate museum practices pushed the research for this thesis in a direction which sought to understand how they incorporate indigenous curatorial methods in such a large, seemingly mainstream institution, and the museum staffs’ understanding of why they were doing this.

This thesis explores the questions of how and why indigenous curation is incorporated into collections care and management for American Indian sacred, ceremonial, and religious items at the DMNS through the examination of staff discourse. This thesis also discusses the importance of incorporating non-Western ontologies and epistemologies into classically Western science and natural history museums, and how this helps reconcile differing collections care and management practices. Through the presentation and examination of data and literature, I argue that it is important to include indigenous curation in museums because it aids in cultural revitalization and reclamation for Native Americans, and that incorporating indigenous curatorial methods and



alternative ontologies and epistemologies aids in the decolonization process in museums. This argument is presented through a case study of the DMNS, and is outlined below.

### **Terminology**

One of my research goals is to discuss how and why indigenous curation is a form of ethical and culturally appropriate practice at the DMNS. “Ethical and culturally appropriate” is meant to encapsulate both “appropriate museology”, or *culturally appropriate* collections care and management (Kreps 2008) and the ethical reasons why a museum may be including indigenous curatorial methods. Is the inclusion of indigenous curatorial methods an issue of ethics? This will be discussed at length in the literature review, however in order to situate the idea of indigenous curation within a discussion of ethics, one can examine the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics:

[c]ollections of human remains and material of sacred significance should be acquired only if they can be housed securely and cared for respectfully. This must be accomplished in a manner consistent with professional standards and the interests and beliefs of members of the community, ethnic or religious group from which the objects originated, where these are known. (International Council of Museums 2013, 3)

Objects which have “sacred significance” and human remains need to be cared for in a way that is respectful to the people the item or human remains originate from.

Additionally, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which will also be discussed at length in the literature review, situates access to cultural heritage as a human right. This particular research goal sets out to understand how and why the museum staff understand the incorporation of indigenous curatorial methods as ethical and culturally appropriate.

I utilize the terms “sacred, ceremonial, and religious” in an effort to include objects in this project that may not be defined as sacred by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). According to NAGPRA, sacred objects are “specific ceremonial objects which are needed by traditional Native American religious leaders for the practice of traditional Native American religions by their present day adherents” (U.S. Congress 1990:167). I am hoping that by broadening the scope beyond “sacred” objects, this thesis is inclusionary of objects that may not be included in the legal NAGPRA definition.

Additionally, I use both “American Indian” and “Native American” throughout the thesis because both of these terms used to identify indigenous people in the United States are fraught with issues, and there does not seem to be consensus among indigenous peoples in the United States or in the literature reviewed for this thesis as to which is more appropriate. Finally, this project is critical in nature, and seeks to understand the perspective of museum professionals who work with Native American material culture. The goal of this project is to understand how museum professionals are incorporating these methods and to what extent, and why museum staff think indigenous curatorial methods are implemented into the museum. It is important to note, however, that Native Americans and museum professionals are not mutually exclusive groups, and that neither museum professionals nor Native Americans are one, culturally homogenous group with the same beliefs and ideas about the care of material culture in mainstream museums.

### **Summary of the Chapters**

To begin the discussion and contextualize the collection in question, Chapter Two covers the history of collecting American Indian material culture in the United States, and

specifically the Crane family, who donated over twelve thousand objects to the DMNS in the 1960s. Chapter Two discusses the context in which the Cranes were amassing American Indian material culture, as well as the history of atrocities committed against American Indians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which justified the taking of American Indian material culture and individuals through a combination of unethical collecting and thievery, as well as participation in the tourist market.

Chapter Three is a literature review of legislation and declarations which situate repatriation of individuals and material culture to American Indians as a legal process and a human right. This chapter also covers work done by other museum scholars who outline the importance of indigenous curation, what indigenous curation is, and examples of its inclusion in museums in the United States and abroad. The chapter ends by discussing how repatriation and indigenous curation can help Native Americans reclaim and revitalize their cultures.

Chapter Four outlines the methodology used to answer the previously stated research question and analyze the data. This chapter also outlines the three research goals which were formulated from the original research question: to find examples of indigenous curation at the DMNS, discuss how and why indigenous curation is a form of ethical and culturally appropriate practice at the DMNS, and discuss how and why the DMNS reconciles the use of “best practices” and Western collections care and management practices with indigenous curation of American Indian sacred, ceremonial, and religious items. This chapter also discusses my positionality as a white academic of museum and heritage studies within the field of anthropology

Chapter Five discusses the theoretical frameworks which influenced and guided the research design and the analysis of the data. This chapter covers the social lives, cultural biography, and agency of objects as discussed by Kopytoff (1986), Appadurai (1986) and Gell (1998). It also covers non-Western ontologies and epistemologies regarding human relationships with objects, and ends with a discussion of postcolonialism and decolonizing museums, and how indigenous curation can contribute to decolonizing museums.

In Chapter Six, I analyze the data from interviews with six current and former staff members of the DMNS. I discuss the three research goals outlined above and provide examples of indigenous curation at the DMNS, analyze staff discourse which demonstrates how and why indigenous curation is both ethical and culturally appropriate at the DMNS, and conclude by demonstrating how the staff at the DMNS reconcile the idea of “best practices” and Western standards of collections care and management with indigenous curation through world building discourse which highlights the open and adaptive museum practice the museum staff have formed.

## **CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND**

### **Introduction**

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many private collectors, scientists, and institutions were avidly collecting American Indian objects in North America. As will be discussed throughout this chapter, at a time when American Indians were being murdered, displaced from their lands, and forced to assimilate by settlers as well as the United States government, many of the objects and bodies that would eventually end up in museums were collected in a manner which ignored the fact that living groups of people were struggling to survive and focused on the idea that these cultures were dying (Thomas 2000, xxxii). These objects and individuals were also collected to bolster European connections to the land (Fine-Dare 2002, xv). It was believed that many of the American Indian people who lived in North America at the time would soon die out or completely assimilate, leaving no record of their culture. This was one impetus for the intensive collecting of American Indian objects and bodies. This “salvage” mindset was an extension of the imperialist zeitgeist of the time.

This chapter will discuss the historical context of collecting American Indian material culture and bodies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It will also discuss who was collecting these objects; including anthropologists, artists, and amateur collectors and the impetus for amassing these collections. This chapter ends by discussing

a very large collection which was amassed under the salvage paradigm, the Crane collection, which is now housed at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science.

### **Historical Context**

It is important to first discuss the historical context within which these objects were collected. Mainstream museums now hold American Indian objects and bodies because of Manifest Destiny; the idea that the American people were exceptional and destined to spread their beliefs and selves from the east coast to the west coast of the continent. As stated by Fine-Dare,

[w]hen this religious and cultural impulse [manifest destiny] is combined with the activities of empire building, much light can be shed on the reasons why millions of American Indian and Native Hawaiian human remains and cultural objects were obtained by museums and private collections. (2002, 14)

Because American settlers at the time believed they were superior to the indigenous people, indeed exceptional as a group of people, the next step for them was to spread this exceptionalism and to get rid of the American Indians who might get in the way.

This idea justified the taking of material culture and American Indian bodies, as well as genocidal actions enacted by the United States militaries. The outright taking of material culture can be seen in the example of Charles Fletcher Lummis, a settler who moved from east to west (Ohio to California) encountering "...a territory that seemed strange, wonderful, romantic, and noble" in the 1880s (Wilson and Falkenstein-Doyle 1999, 78). The "relic hunting" started while he was farming in Ohio (Wilson and Falkenstein-Doyle 1999, 83) and continued during his journey to California: "[s]ometimes he acknowledged buying an object, but more often he implied that he excavated it" (1999, 83). Lummis would later go on to create the Southwest Museum in

Los Angeles from his collection (Wilson and Falkenstein-Doyle 1999). Lummis was excavating American Indian material culture around the same time that the United States government was committing genocide. Massacres of American Indian peoples in the late nineteenth century include the Sand Creek massacre in Colorado in 1864, where and when over a hundred Cheyenne and Arapahoe people were killed (Thomas 2000, 53), and the Wounded Knee massacre in South Dakota in 1890 during which around three hundred Lakota people were killed (Gitlin 2011, xxviii-xxiii). After the Sand Creek Massacre, many of the bodies were shipped to the Army Medical Museum in Washington, D.C. (Thomas 2000, 53).

After a century full of genocide, assimilation was the focus in the twentieth century. In the mid-twentieth century, Congress implemented forced assimilationist legislation known as “termination” to effectively eliminate American Indian reservations (Thomas 2000, 195). According to Thomas, “[t]he basic thinking was pretty easy to follow...if we integrate Indians as *individual Americans*, then the federal government can once and for all get off the reservation” (2000, 195). This policy, in the case of the Menominee, “...turned the Menominee from a tolerably successful Indian Reservation into Wisconsin’s poorest country. The tribal economy collapsed with the federal pullout...” (Thomas 2000, 196). Clearly, the government was not done in trying to rid itself of the responsibility of upholding treaties, granting sovereignty, and supporting people who they forcibly removed from their land.

The horrid treatment of American Indians in the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries didn’t start mid-century, however. In the early 1900s, when Ishi, “the last Yahi” was “found” in Oroville,

California, Alfred Kroeber, an American Anthropologist and former student of Franz Boas, displayed Ishi in a "...wildly popular living exhibit" at the Museum of Anthropology in San Francisco (Thomas 2000, 85). It is important to note that Ishi was "the last of his kind" because of genocide committed by Californian residents who were supported by the State of California to execute Native Americans (Starn 2004, 113). The twentieth century was a time during which American Anthropology began to expand as a field, relying on the analysis and display of human remains to bolster its expanding scientism (Corbey 1993, 354), much as English collectors of objects from India did so to "acquire an aura of authenticity" during a time when science "...had not yet been fully and decisively separated from art" (Breckenridge 1989, 206). Ethnologists and archaeologists were encouraged to maintain an outsider's perspective while studying American Indians, and to not value their accounts of historical events (Thomas 2000, 101). Even Franz Boas, an anthropologist known for scientifically investigating and dispelling the idea of biological differences between races (Thomas 2000, 105), avidly collected American Indian objects.

### **Who Was Collecting and Why?**

Those collecting American Indian material culture included, but were not limited to, anthropologists, artists, institutions such as museums and universities, and amateur private collectors. Anthropologists, artists, and private collectors curated items which would eventually end up in museums, whether they were state sponsored such as the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), or run by private collectors such as the



Southeast Museum of the North American Indian which was owned and filled by Mary and Francis Crane.

Anthropologists collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under the “salvage” paradigm: “[d]uring the 19<sup>th</sup> century people began to sense the urgency of collection for the sake of preserving data whose extinction was feared” (Gruber 1970, 1290). The idea that American Indian (among other) cultures were quickly dying out and would be leaving their material culture unattended further promulgated the patronizing rationale that anthropologists and their institutions should hold material culture because “...if sites, human remains, and cultural objects are left unprotected by those with the wisdom and resources to properly protect them, they will be lost forever to humanity” (Fine-Dare 2002, 44).

One example of this can be seen in the collecting that was done by Franz Boas for the American Museum of Natural History as its first curator. Not only did Boas collect tangible cultural heritage, but also intangible cultural heritage:

Hunt and Boas collected vast quantities of Kwakwaka’wakw intellectual property (secret knowledges, ritual practices, oral traditions, and so on) and coordinated the removal (through theft and purchase) of thousands of religious, cultural, and patrimonial items...[m]etaphorically and literally, Boas promised to preserve Kwakwaka’wakw treasures by capturing them in more durable boxes. Although he likened this process to the traditional carved wooden boxes made by Northwest Coast peoples to preserve cultural treasures (Briggs and Bauman 1999, 480), there was a key difference: Boas’s boxes would be taken away to museums. (Bruchac 2014, 158)

Even though Boas is celebrated as a visionary anthropologist for his time, he too participated in the patronizing attitude museums and white anthropologists had towards the material culture of “the other”. Additionally, some indigenous persons assisted

anthropologists and other collectors in amassing these objects. George Hunt, a man of Tlingit and English descent, became Boas's "field agent among the Northwest Coast Indians" (Bruchac 2014, 155). Hunt was fluent in Tlingit, English, and Kwak'wala because of his parents' backgrounds as well as his marriages to two Kwakwaka'wakw "...*Wi'oma, women of noble families and high rank*" (Bruchac 2014, 155, quoting Bell 2005). Hunt had access to much of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage Boas desired because of his position and relationship to these powerful women (Bruchac 2014). American Indians participated in the production and sale of material culture into the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well. Frank Ettawageshik of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians discusses his father's business in Harbor Springs in Northern Michigan, and the impact the tourist trade had on their culture. He states, "[t]he tourist market served by my father's business and other businesses like his was instrumental in keeping people working in this art form while the art world was becoming more sophisticated in its appreciation of American Indian art" (Ettawageshik 1999, 25).

In contrast to the Boasian way of collecting for a large institution, anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss collected items while he was in the United States for his own enjoyment as well as for his research on mythology (Massonet 2007). As Cohen-Solal states, "[h]e was, in his own words, 'fascinated by exotic curiosities'" (2000, 252). After becoming friends with André Breton, the father of Surrealism, while fleeing Europe during Nazi occupation, "[t]he two men began to engage in a dialogue on art, a conversation that was to last nearly a quarter of a century" (Massonet 2007, 100-101). After spending time doing ethnographic work in South America, Lévi-Strauss returned to

New York and became friends with many of the other European Surrealists who had fled Europe during World War II (Massonet 2007). He began to collect art from the Northwest Coast with the likes of André Breton, Max Ernst, and Peggy Guggenheim (Massonet 2007).

Lévi-Strauss' collecting habits differed from those of the artists:

[h]e was not looking for a springboard to a dream, or for the key to a mystery, or for a vector for magic. While he appreciated the aesthetic qualities of the Northwest Coast objects...his approach was scientific and incorporated the remove that such methodology demands. (Massonet 2007, 102)

The surrealist artists and the anthropologist were collecting from Julius Carlebach, a gallery owner who had access to deaccessioned items from the Heye Foundation, whose holdings would later form the base collection for the National Museum of the American Indian (Massonet 2007). Lévi-Strauss collected items such as Kwakwaka'wakw transformation masks, a Tsimshian ceremonial headdress, a Tlingit Helmet mask, and a "Tlingit curio" (Massonet 2007). Lévi-Strauss, like many of the people who were collecting American Indian objects in the nineteenth and twentieth century "...realized fairly quickly that he and his friends had put together a unique collection of American Indian pieces...he began to think about producing an exhibition of their masks in France" (Massonet 2007, 107). Eventually, some of the objects acquired by Lévi-Strauss, André Breton, and the rest of the surrealist troupe's objects would be housed in the Musée du Quai Branly, a museum for the indigenous art of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas in Paris, France (Massonet, 2007, 100).

As mentioned previously, Surrealist artists collected alongside Lévi-Strauss. Max Ernst, married to Peggy Guggenheim at the time, stumbled upon Julius Carlebach's gallery:

[h]is attention was suddenly drawn by a strange object, a Haida spoon...[t]he next day, Ernst returned to the shop accompanied by his Surrealist friends. In short order, Breton, Lévi-Strauss, Georges Duthuit, Robert Lebe, Isabelle Waldberg, Robert Matta, and Enrico Donati all discovered the dealer's Eskimo masks and Northwest Coast Indian objects. (Massonet 2007, 102)

Ernst collected objects such as the Haida spoon, a Gwasila Figurative Post, and Hopi Kachina dolls (Massonet 2007; Kavky 2010). According to Kavky, Surrealists saw American Indian art as something that was "...universally 'primitive'" and which "...transcended national, racial, and ethnic boundaries" (2010, 211).

In addition to anthropologists and artists, many amateur collectors were collecting items not for state funded institutions but for private collections, and in some cases for their own museums. These private collectors also seem to have had the intention of collecting American Indian objects as a way to "preserve" cultures that were thought to be "vanishing" within a salvage paradigm, similarly to those who were collecting scientifically at the time (Sturtevant 1999, v; McCaffrey 1999, 51). In *Collecting Native America, 1870-1960*, various authors discuss private collectors' varying motivations for collecting American Indian material culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These interests included the fascination with the "exotic" or the "other" (Lee 1999), obsession with "authentic", "traditional" indigenous culture, "genuine interest in aboriginal history" (McCaffrey 1999, 51-52), the creation of private museums (Wilson

and Falkenstien-Doyle 1999; Krech 1999; Jacknis 1999; Herold 1999), patronage of anthropology (Jacknis 1999), and public benefaction and education (Herold 1999).

Both private collectors and persons collecting for museums or academic research had similar motivations for amassing objects. The underlying desire to collect American Indian objects in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries stemmed from curiosity surrounding human diversity. Furthermore, a patronizing attitude helped individuals gain access, ownership, and the ability to represent American Indian culture. Additionally, the idea that collecting these items was not just a desire to have things for oneself but to benefit the public in some way was also prevalent. This public benefaction would be manifested through displaying the objects in museums or having objects accessible to scientists who desired to expand the understanding of the diversity of humanity.

Many American Indians spoke out against injustices such as the unethical collection of American Indian material culture, ancestors, and intangible culture during the self-determination movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Lonetree 2012, 4; Hill 2001, 314). Vine Deloria Jr.'s book, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, was published in 1969, "trashing academics, missionaries, Congress, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and most other non-Indians who frequented Indian country" (Thomas 2000, 199). However, the United States Congress would not pass any laws regarding injustices done by collectors until 1989 and 1990, when the National Museum of the American Indian Act and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act were passed. The guidelines by which museums have to abide by under these laws are still being worked

through today as museums across the country sort through, inventory, and return the American Indian bodies and material culture on their shelves.

Many of these objects were collected by both museums and private collectors who were competing for ownership of American Indian objects in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, yet many collections by private individuals for their own museums ended up in Western museums (Sturtevant 1999, vi). This is precisely what happened with the thousands of American Indian objects amassed by “amateur” collectors Mary and Francis Crane in the mid-twentieth century, which created the Southeast Museum of the North American Indian and eventually landed in the anthropology collections at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (Herold 1999).

### **Mary Winslow Allen and Francis Valentine Crane**

Eventual amateur collectors Mary Winslow Allen and Francis Valentine Crane were both born and raised in upper class families in Massachusetts (Herold 1999, 261). Mary Winslow Allen was the daughter of Frank Gilman Allen who headed two family companies and served as governor of Massachusetts from 1929-1930 (Herold 1999, 261). Francis Crane was the son of a banker (Herold 1999, 261). Both graduated from college in the 1920s, Mary from Wellesley College in 1921 and Frank from Harvard 1925. They were married in 1927 (Herold 1999, 261). They began their upper-class careers as dog breeders, introducing the Great Pyrenees to the United States in 1930 (Herold 1999, 261).

After World War II, the Cranes began spending their winters in the Florida Keys, and their summers in Boston (Herold 1999, 262). The Cranes later “developed a twenty-acre parcel of Crane Point into an environmentally safeguarded residential subdivision,

called Crane Hammock, adjoining Marathon” in the mid-1950s “...in order to solidify their position in Florida” (Herold 1999, 264). It was during this time that the Cranes began to acquire a large collection of American Indian objects during their retirement travels (Herold 1999, 264).

The colossal collection that would make its way from Florida to Denver in 1968 was started when the Cranes set out on a “...warm-season buying trip to New Mexico, Arizona, and California” where and when they would acquire 2,864 American Indian objects (Herold 1999, 264). According to Herold,

[b]y 1958, after seven years of museum planning and collecting across North America, the Cranes had accumulated 5,500 objects, completed a new museum building, installed museum exhibits, opened to the public, and at last had a dedicated area for processing and storing the Crane American Indian Collection. (1999, 264-265).

This museum was called the Southeast Museum of the North American Indian and eventually would house eleven thousand six hundred objects by 1968 (Herold 1999, 265). In the span of seventeen years, the Cranes amassed almost twelve thousand objects, all of which would eventually be donated to the Denver Museum of Natural History (DMNH), now the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS). This massive donation effectively recreated the Anthropology Department at DMNS after renowned archaeologist and head of the Archaeology Department at DMNH, Marie Wormington, was let go (Colwell Chanthaphonh et al. 2013, 302). The collection is roughly one fifth of the entire anthropology collection at DMNS today, which, according to the DMNS website, houses approximately 50,000 objects as of October 6, 2016.

The Crane collection includes Navajo blankets, Hopi tihu (kachinas), clothing, religious items, and Northwest Coast potlatch materials. (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2013, 307). The Cranes also collected pottery, sculpture, jewelry, paintings, painted skins, carvings, and baskets (Crane Copy, DMNS Archives). Religious items in the collection include Iroquois false face masks, Zuni fetishes, a Mohave ceremonial doll, and a ceremonial drum (Crane Copy, DMNS Archives). The objects from the collection now make up the majority of one of the anthropology department's permanent exhibitions at DMNS – the “North American Indian Cultures Hall”, or as some still call it “Crane Hall”.

The Cranes collected from any source they could find objects they were interested in, including

dealers, galleries, museums, professional and amateur collectors, the descendants of early government workers and travelers, Indian artists and owners, and all manner of interested sellers and donors... They shopped once in Meso- and South America, occasionally in England, and frequently in Canada. (Herold 1999, 271)

Herold also states that the Cranes employed “businesslike reserve and economy” to build their collection as well as by “...blending amateur and entrepreneurial approaches” (1999, 270-271).

The Cranes did not discriminate from where or from whom they collected, and collected during a time when objects such as those mentioned previously were made specifically for the tourist trade, and as Phillips states, when the people who made these tourist objects “manipulated commodity production in order to serve economic needs as well as new demands for self-representation and self-identification” (Phillips and Steiner 1999, 4). However, the issue of what is an authentic sacred object, and therefore subject to NAGPRA, is complex and full of issues (2000, 89).



As previously discussed in reference to imperialism and genocide, many of the reasons for collecting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often had imperialist and destructive intents and outcomes. The extent to which this is true for the Cranes cannot be fully ascertained. Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. suggest that their motivations were not definitive (2013, 306). However, Herold states "...cultural, familial, personal, and other moving forces" were among some of the "...moving forces behind the Crane Collection" (1999, 266). As participants in wealthy Northeastern society, it was a cultural expectation that they would have a successful avocation, as well as "...participate actively, use time and money responsibly, and benefit both self and society" (Herold 1999, 266). Within their family, both had parents or grandparents who collected American Indian objects (Herold 1999, 266-267). Additionally, it can be said that as part of the upper class in the Northeast, "...the acquisition of appropriate material culture practiced as *productive work*" (Clemmer 2008, 189).

The Cranes also seem to have perpetuated the idea that they were "salvaging" materials from a "dying culture":

Many of these crafts we must enjoy and collect TODAY for TOMORROW they may probably be a lost art. Here in the museum [the Southeast Museum of the North American Indian] you may gather History the easy way and witness life as it was lived in the past by many tribes, and fortunately is still lived by some tribes today. (Crane Copy, DMNS Archives)

There were many reasons why the Cranes collected these objects, but according to Herold, it seems that public benefaction and education were their main goals, considering the creation of the Southeast Museum of the North American Indian as well as the eventual donation to the Denver Museum of Natural History (Herold 1999, 268). Herold

quotes Mary explaining the impetus for collecting: ““There is no fun in just keeping it to yourself, I mean you want to have it go where it will be seen and appreciated and do some good, create some interest”” (Herold 1999, 268).

Public benefaction was a driving force for Mary and Francis Crane’s decision to give almost 12,000 objects to the Denver Museum of Natural History. According to Francis Crane, quoted in an article in the Miami Herald, Keys Edition:

‘[g]reater exposure where it will do the most good for the most people’ was the main reason given for the move of the Crane Foundation collection, according to Francis V. Crane, sponsor...’[w]e struggle to get 5,000 people in a year and they have that many in a day’. (Miami Herald, Keys Addition, Friday, August 9, 1978)

Although public benefaction seems to be the motivating factor for donating the collection, it also seems that DMNH was actively seeking the collection. Arminta Neal, the acting director of the museum made remarks at a quarterly trustee meeting in May of 1978, stating that the then Assistant Director of the museum, Roy Coy, contacted the Cranes to see if they were interested in making DMNH the permanent home for the collection (Arminta Neal, remarks from quarterly meeting May 17, 1978). The DMNH knew that the collection would be quite the asset with the recent dissolution of the archaeology department (Colwell Chantaphonh et al. 2013, 305).

Herold (1999) portrays the Cranes as collectors of material culture for educational purposes, however archival research undertaken at DMNS suggests the Cranes were also collecting under the “salvage” paradigm which was popular during that time period. It is important to discuss the extent to which the ideals of “public benefaction” and “education” contributed to the idea that American Indian culture was disappearing.

Although the Crane Foundation was established to build a museum for the public and to

support the collection of American Indian objects, it can also be said that the Cranes, in order to establish a collection for public benefaction, were participating in a part of the twentieth century way of thinking which privileged the viewing pleasure and education of the “American People” over the well-being of those who the culture belonged to. The Cranes, while collecting for educational purposes were doing this in order to preserve art forms they thought would become “lost” (Crane Copy, DMNS Archives). This seems to be a part of how the majority of collectors of American Indian objects were operating in the twentieth century.

## **CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW: NAGPRA AND INDIGENOUS CURATION**

After the intensive collecting of American Indian individuals and cultural heritage through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Krech and Hail 1999; Fine-Dare 2002; Thomas 2000) and the reassertion of American Indian rights of self-determination throughout the later part of twentieth century (Lonetree 2012, 4; Hill 2001, 314), the protection of indigenous tangible and intangible cultural heritage has come to be seen as a human right. Article eleven of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) declares:

[i]ndigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature. (UNDRIP 2008, 6)

Additionally, article twelve of UNDRIP states

[i]ndigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects, and the right to the repatriation of their human remains. (UNDRIP 2008, 6)

UNDRIP declares that practicing and revitalizing cultural traditions and customs is a human right, and this right involves access to material culture. Additionally, the right to

practice spiritual and religious traditions involves access and control of sacred, ceremonial, or religious objects as well as the repatriation of human remains.

Although the United States was one of only four nation states in the UN to vote against UNDRIP (Hall and Fenelon 2009, 139), NAGPRA, which passed in 1990, deals with similar issues as articles eleven and twelve in UNDRIP. NAGPRA is a United States Law which provides a legal process for museums and federal institutions holding American Indian individuals, sacred objects, objects of cultural patrimony, and funerary objects to follow to repatriate these items. It also outlines regulations for archaeologists, or others who excavate on federal or tribal land, to follow (U.S. Congress 1990). However, many scholars discuss NAGPRA as human rights legislation (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Nash 2010, 100; Fine-Dare 2002, 8; Kreps 2003, 83; Trope and Echo-Hawk 2000, 123) as well as a form of restorative justice – a way to right historical wrongs (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Nash 2010, 100; Deloria 2000, 179; Fine-Dare 2002, 177-179). NAGPRA is not just a law which gives museums a legal process to go through in order to repatriate individuals and objects (Fine-Dare 2002, 177): it “...involves deeply religious, humanitarian, and human rights concerns” (Fine-Dare 2002, 177). As previously discussed, many of these individuals and objects were taken through unethical and questionable means, and NAGPRA serves as a process for museums and other federal agencies and institutions to follow in order to repatriate individuals and objects to their rightful owners.

Beyond implementing the required provisions of NAGPRA in federally funded museums within the United States, scholars also discuss the recognition of the “spirit” of

NAGPRA (Kreps 2003, 83; Trope and Echo-Hawk 2000, 151) – the idea that museums should honor “the traditions, values, and beliefs of Native Americans regarding their cultural property” and adjust “museum practices to accommodate them” (Kreps 2003, 83). This honoring of Native American beliefs and values can go beyond what is required by legislation, and can include indigenous curation. Indigenous curatorial methods can be implemented in museums through consultation with American Indian groups. The implementation of indigenous curation is a way for indigenous peoples to reclaim and revitalize their tangible and intangible cultural heritage within western, mainstream museum models as well as outside mainstream museum models within the context of dominant ontologies.

### **Indigenous Curation, Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage**

As defined by Kreps, indigenous curation includes non-western models of museums, curatorial methods, and concepts of cultural heritage preservation (2009, 194). Indigenous curation opens museological practice to other existing epistemologies and ontologies:

Indigenous curation also constitutes a form of ‘indigenous knowledge,’ which has become important for understanding the ways people order and communicate about the world, and what serves as the information base of a society. Through the study of indigenous knowledge systems we have come to see that there is not one, but many ways of knowing. (Kreps 1998, 4)

Kreps also discusses Cash Cash, who identifies curation as “a social practice predicated on the principle of a fixed relation between material objects and the human environment” (2001, 140). This definition of curation offers a “liberated” (Cash Cash 2001, 140) perspective on the definition of curation, which extends beyond the boundaries of the

curation of objects within museums, and outlines curation as a human's social relationship with objects (Kreps 2003, 49). Other concepts that extend the idea of curation outside the boundaries of the museum are those of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Although both tangible and intangible cultural heritage are present in museums, both are also present in the everyday lives of peoples and can be curated. Tangible cultural heritage includes the objects that we often see in museums, and one can easily understand how objects are curated in mainstream museums through conservation, preservation, handling, and display. The curation of intangible cultural heritage, however, is less obvious within a Western ontology. The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage defines intangible cultural heritage as:

The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (UNESCO 2003, Article 2.1)

UNESCO also gives examples of intangible cultural heritage. These include “oral traditions and expressions including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship" (UNESCO 2003, Article 2.2). Through the discussion of intangible cultural heritage, an understanding of curation outside of the four walls of the museum can begin.

Indigenous curation, along with repatriation programs, are ways in which indigenous peoples can assert non-Western ontologies and revitalize and reclaim their

cultural heritage – both tangible and intangible. “Traditional indigenous knowledge forms”, according to Stewart-Harawira, “have a profound contribution to make towards an alternative ontology for a just global order” (2005, 32).

### **Repatriation Legislation in the United States**

As previously mentioned, the United States has legislation that addresses the rights of indigenous peoples to religious freedom, repatriation of ancestors, and cultural heritage. The American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) (1978) was the first act in the United States that mentioned the possibility of repatriation of cultural heritage for American Indians. Section one of AIRFA states that the United States will

protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right to freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions of the American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut, and Native Hawaiians, including but not limited to access to sites, *use and possession of sacred objects*, and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rights. (U.S. Congress 1978, 139, emphasis added)

However, AIRFA was criticized as “toothless” because it was not enforceable and “it was basically ignored, particularly at first” (Finkelman 2008, 80).

Eventually, the National Museum of the American Indian Act would be passed in 1989. This act established the National Museum of the American Indian, as well as the mandatory inventory of human remains and funerary objects within Smithsonian Institutions (without a deadline) and repatriation of these items to their respective cultures (U.S. Congress 1989). A year later, in 1990 NAGPRA would be passed. NAGPRA, as human rights legislation, established that the “ownership or control of Native American cultural items which are excavated or discovered on Federal or tribal lands after November 16, 1990” would be with lineal descendants, or to those whose tribal land the



object was found on, or to those who establish “the closest cultural affiliation” (U.S. Congress 1990, 170). It also established the protection of American Indian burial sites (U.S. Congress 1990, 172) and mandated that every federal agency and each museum with American Indian human remains as well as associated and unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony be inventoried (human remains and associated funerary objects) or included in a written summary (unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony) (U.S. Congress 1990, 170-175). None of these laws require indigenous curation to be present within museums, yet some museums including the National Museum of the American Indian (Rosoff 1998), the University of Denver Museum of Anthropology (Kreps 2003) and the Denver Museum of Nature and Science are incorporating indigenous curatorial methods into their curation practices as a way to keep with the “spirit” of NAGPRA, and respect the rights of American Indians to have their cultural heritage stored in a culturally sensitive manner.

### **Examples of Indigenous Curation in the United States**

As stated previously, indigenous curation exists both within and outside of the museum context. In museums, Kreps, quoting Parker (1990), notes that sacred objects should be handled by someone with proper authority (2003, 92). Kreps also discusses how “some museums try to familiarize themselves with each tribe’s cultural protocol and work with ‘qualified caretakers’” (2003, 92). At the University of Denver Museum of Anthropology (DUMA),

[h]uman remains have been isolated from the general collections and are stored in a separate NAGPRA vault. Items of cultural patrimony and sacred objects are also stored in a specially designated NAGPRA vault. Access to these rooms is restricted to museum staff and tribal representatives... Women are not allowed to

enter the storage room or handle items during menstruation or, in some cases, pregnancy...human remains and associated funerary objects are not stored in plastic or lidded boxes. Instead, muslin and acid-free tissue paper are used in storage containers so the remains and objects can breathe. Tribal representatives are also permitted to feed or make offerings to objects at the time of their visits. (Kreps 2003, 95)

Kreps, the director of DUMA, also notes the difficulty of incorporating certain indigenous curatorial methods, such as the inclusion of organic materials in the preservation space because “they pose the risk of harboring or attracting pests”, yet notes that the Department of Anthropology mitigates this risk by putting organic materials “in sealed polyethylene bags or placed in a box next to the object” (Kreps 2003, 97).

Patricia Pierce Erikson also discusses indigenous sensibilities, ways of knowing, and ways of preserving culture at the Makah Cultural and Research Center in Neah Bay, Washington in *Voices of a Thousand People* (2002). Erikson discusses the organization of the collection space at the Makah Cultural and Research Center (MCRC) and the organization of “culturally appropriate collections management systems for the Makah people”. This includes utilizing Makah cognitive and conceptual categories (Erikson 2002, 183-184) “for organizing the collection...for stimulating reflection on Makah world-views codified in their language” (Erikson 2002, 184). By doing this, the MCRC, which utilizes “standard scientific archaeological collections management systems”, broadens the goals from preserving only the tangible objects to “preserve a living culture” (Erikson 2002, 184).

The Denver Museum of Nature and Science, the institution this thesis focuses on, has also implemented indigenous curatorial methods for the Hopi katsina tithu (Maxson et. al 2011). The katsina tithu were reclassified in 2008 according to information given by

Lee Wayne Lomayestewa, a Hopi cultural advisor (Maxson et. al 2011, 4). He gave “his opinion on whether the museum catalogue had the correct name and whether the katsina warranted special care as a sacred object” (Maxson et. al 2011, 4). He found that a lot of the time, the museum had the name for the particular katsina tihu wrong, and even that some of them “...were Zuni rather than Hopi” (Maxson et. al 2011, 4).

These examples of indigenous curation demonstrate some of the issues with applying Western museum methods to indigenous materials. However, when museums are made by the people the material culture comes from, or when the museum holding the items consults with tribes, a profusion of information about the items and how they should be cared for or named is associated with them. The living, intangible culture is associated or re-associated with the tangible, material objects.

Outside the museum context, an example of indigenous curation in the United States can be seen with the Lakota curation of sacred land in the film “In the Light of Reverence” (2001). According to Freedman, Mato Tipila or “Devil’s Tower”, in the state of Wyoming, is “a sacred place steeped in Native American culture and history, a place of religious practices and creation” (2007, 2). Despite this, Lakota people have a hard time interacting with this sacred site during the summer solstice because of its status as a national monument that receives five hundred thousand visitors a year (Freedman 2007, 2). The film “In the Light of Reverence” (2001) shows how Lakota visitors tie prayer bundles and prayer cloths to trees in the area surrounding Mato Tipila, which, along with voluntary climbing limitations on the formation, offend some non-Native residents in the area as well as visiting climbers.

Freedman, citing Zellmer, discusses how “Indian religions and cultures are inextricably interwoven with the physical attributes and history of the land in ways the governmental institutions such as courts and land management agencies, as well as the broader public, may be unaware of or fail to acknowledge” (2007, 4). However, the Lakota continue to practice curation of the area through the relationship between “material objects and the human environment” (Cash Cash 2001, 140) by placing prayer bundles and cloths in the surrounding sacred land. In “In the Light of Reverence” (2001) Vine Deloria Jr. acknowledges that the ceremonies involving sacred land do not involve ownership, but respect for the land, and that this is difficult for people outside the Lakota ontology to understand. Cash Cash’s previously discussed definition of curation as “a social practice predicated on the principle of a fixed relation between material objects and the human environment” (2001, 140) shows how two different ontological ideas of curation can cause conflict between groups of people.

### **Repatriation in New Zealand**

The Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme, along with biculturalism, at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) in New Zealand are examples of indigenous curation and a repatriation program that are taking place outside of the United States which can contribute to the discussion of the importance of “the spirit of NAGPRA” in the United States. The Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme at the Te Papa Tongarewa in New Zealand focuses specifically on the return of Maori and Moriori ancestral remains to iwi (tribes) in New Zealand from other nations, as well as to iwi from Te Papa. While the policy appears to still be in a draft phase as “The Museum of

New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Koiwi Tangata Policy”, it does explain how koiwi tangata (human remains) came to be a part of, are stored within, and have access restrictions within Te Papa. This policy also outlines the requirements for international and domestic repatriation of koiwi tangata to iwi. Beyond the repatriation of human remains, New Zealand’s biculturalism, especially prevalent at Te Papa, brings indigenous knowledge systems into the museum.

New Zealand is, purportedly, a bicultural country “with government acknowledgement of the partnership implicit within the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi” (Clavir 2002, 218). In the context of conservation at Te Papa, the questions of ownership, repatriation, and indigenous curation are not as fraught as they may be in the United States and Canada. According to Clavir, conservators at Te Papa contextualize objects within the indigenous culture they originate from (Clavir 2002, 24). Additionally, Clavir notes, “making decisions on issues in which conservation values conflict with indigenous values is an easier task for conservators in New Zealand than it is for conservators in Canada. The official national policy and its sanctions are undoubtedly a contributing factor to this (2002, 241). Furthermore, “Maori ownership is undisputed; therefore the conservator’s task is to give advice rather than to make final decisions” regarding object conservation (Clavir 2002, 241). With a combination of the repatriation program and biculturalism, indigenous knowledge systems seem to permeate Te Papa and New Zealand as a nation.

Under NAGPRA in the United States, tribes have to demonstrate ownership of items through cultural affiliation in order to have legal control of the items. The

ownership by the various tribes is not “undisputed” as Clavir (2002,241) would say. If items posted in inventories cannot be culturally affiliated, tribes can claim cultural affiliation through “geographical, kinship, biological, archaeological, anthropological, linguistic, folkloric, oral traditional, historical, or other relevant information or expert opinion” (U.S. Congress 1990). However, the legal ownership remains with the museum if the items are not claimed or remain culturally affiliated. The ownership from a legal perspective, however, can differ from how museum professionals understand who these items belong to. This is further discussed in the analysis chapter.

### **Cross-Cultural Examples of Indigenous Curation**

Indigenous curation is also demonstrated by Clavir (2002) who outlines Maori understandings of conservation and preservation through discussions with Maori conservators at Te Papa in New Zealand. In this bicultural institution, many decisions regarding the conservation of an object are “decided within the context of Maori legal ownership of many of the objects in New Zealand’s major museums” (Clavir 2002, 220). Clavir discusses how for many Maori, preserving the spiritual integrity of an object is more important than preserving the physical integrity (2002, 224). She quotes Nick Tupara, a Maori man who stated, “people do touch them [objects], lean on them, break them, abrade them ... fondle them, whatever they do. In a spiritual sense, I suppose they fondle the community. It’s retaining that that is most important” (Clavir 2002, 224). While touching may not be seen as a “best practice” for preservation in western, mainstream museums, here touching does preserve the spiritual integrity of the object.

Kreps also cites examples of indigenous curation and ontological differences regarding curation in museums cross-culturally. Kreps discusses her fieldwork in Indonesia at Museum Balanga in Kalimantan in *Liberating Culture* (2003). She states that after observing museum staff readying a float for Indonesian Independence Day and worrying about the state of the objects on the float, where “[a]n antique ceremonial cloth was being nailed to the side of the truck while two other workers were giving the only masks in the museum’s collection a new coat of paint” (2003, 30), she realized that these objects were not in the same state of “museum object” as objects in western museums might be where they “are made ‘ethnographic’ by the act of detaching them from their original cultural context and recontextualizing them into western scientific frames of reference” (Kreps 2003, 30). The museum staff at Museum Balanga treated objects this way because “they were objects still embedded in Dayak living culture” (Kreps 2003, 30).

Outside of the western museum context, Kreps also discusses “collection, care and reverence for heirloom property, collectively known as pusaka” among the Dayak in Borneo (Kreps 2003, 36). Kreps discusses the particular example of jars, which are curated by Dayak families as “symbols of wealth and status” (Kreps 2003, 40):

In visits to people’s homes in Palangka Raya and elsewhere, I observed large collections of jars. Jars were also essential elements of all Dayak religious ceremonies I attended, such as wedding ceremonies and funerary rituals...I also encountered several individuals who knew a great deal about jars, including their systems of classifications, methods of conservation, various customs dictating their uses, as well as legends telling of their divine origin based on Ngaju cosmology...jars were still highly valued and revered for both their intrinsic and cultural value, and to a certain extent, curated in line with traditional practices. (Kreps 2003, 40)

Although not in a museum, the jars were curated by Dayak individuals in a particular way with a set of rules and contextual information.

Kreps also outlines another form of indigenous curation outside the western museum context, but in the context of conservation and preservation in the form of rice barns in East Kalimantan in Indonesia where rice barns are strategically located as a form of “preventative conservation” (Kreps 2011, 461). Kreps demonstrates the many existing ways to curate objects across multiple cultures, yet shows there are modes of conservation and preservation similar to those in western museums where one may not expect to find them.

### **Indigenous Curation and Repatriation as Reclamation and Revitalization**

The outright destruction of indigenous knowledge systems coupled with taking tangible and intangible culture away from people was one method the United States government used to gain control over American Indian territories. In the example of the Lakota, Hall and Fenelon illuminate how the United States government, through a variety of means, suppressed and attempted to culturally destroy indigenous peoples such as the Lakota who “...had resisted incorporation and subordination” by attempting to destroy their cultural practices as well as their knowledge systems” (Hall and Fenelon 2009, 98). However, incorporating indigenous curation as an alternative epistemology or ontology in museums can be a way for indigenous groups to claim, reclaim, and revitalize their cultures.

Tuhiwai Smith outlines the project of “claiming” in the colonial context as “indigenous peoples making claims and assertions about our rights and dues” yet notes



that it has transformed “into an interesting and dynamic process” (2012, 143). Tuhiwai Smith also outlines the project of revitalizing by stating that “[i]ndigenous languages, their arts and their cultural practices are in various states of crisis” (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 147), yet revitalizing aspects of indigenous culture, such as language “is often regarded as being subversive to national interests and national literacy campaigns” (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 148).

Through indigenous curation, American Indians, First Nations, Maori, Dayak, and other indigenous groups claim, reclaim, and revitalize their cultures. As part of the “interesting and dynamic process” (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 143) of claiming and reclaiming, indigenous peoples continue to assert indigenous knowledge forms. This contributes to cultural revitalization, which can, as Tuhiwai Smith suggests, subvert dominant ideas regarding how human remains, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and sacred places should be cared for.

### **Conclusion**

Tangible and intangible cultural heritage along with the repatriation of human remains is understood as a fundamental human right through national legislation such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and biculturalism, as well as international declarations such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples because of reassertion of indigenous rights by indigenous peoples throughout the twentieth century. By continuing to incorporate indigenous ontologies into mainstream museum practices, indigenous and non-indigenous museum professionals and indigenous peoples can

continue to strengthen relationships that have been developing since the implementation of NAGPRA, and in some cases, before the implementation of NAGPRA. As more institutions begin to incorporate indigenous curation, fulfilling the “spirit of the law” of NAGPRA, museum practices will continue to become more democratized and decolonized.

By asserting these rights in museums and elsewhere, indigenous peoples continue to claim, reclaim, and revitalize their cultures and incorporate indigenous ontologies into dominant societal ontologies. The recognition of the existence of multiple worldviews by dominant societies can contribute to a better understanding of the human condition and mitigate conflict that arises because of peoples’ inability to see the world from alternative perspectives and as Stewart-Harawira suggests “have a profound contribution to make towards an alternative ontology for a just global order” (2005, 32).

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THEORY: ONTOLOGY, POSTCOLONIALISM, AND CRITICAL MUSEUM THEORY**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will address the anthropological theories which influenced the direction of the project. As the project includes discussions of American Indian sacred items in museums, this chapter will discuss the social lives, cultural biography, and agency of objects as discussed by Kopytoff (1986), Appadurai (1986), and Gell (1998). This conversation of how we as humans understand and relate to objects also necessitates a discussion of alternative and non-Western ontologies and epistemologies regarding human relations to objects. Finally, the chapter will end with a discussion of postcolonialism and decolonizing museums, how accepting alternative ontologies contributes to decolonization, and how indigenous curation is a part of this.

### **Object Theory: Social Lives, Cultural Biography, and Agency of Objects**

Both Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff discuss the social life and cultural biography of objects in Appadurai's *The Social Life of Things* (1986). Kopytoff first illuminates unique Western understandings of objects. He argues that "[i]n contemporary Western thought" we understand people and things as existing in two opposite 'poles'" (Kopytoff 1986, 64). Things represent commodities while people represent "...the natural universe of individuation and singularization" (Kopytoff 1986, 64). If people and objects

are not so polar in every culture, one can see how objects could easily be decontextualized when transferred between two different cultures.

Kopytoff also discusses object biographies as a way to understand what happens to an object as it goes through the stages of its life:

[b]iographies...in situations of culture contact [they] can show what anthropologists have so often stressed: that what is significant about the adoption of alien objects – as of alien ideas – is not the fact that they are adopted, but the way they are culturally redefined and put to use. (Kopytoff 1986, 67)

Sacred objects entering museums go through a change as they are decontextualized. For example, a basket that once held sacred objects no longer holds sacred objects once it enters the museum. It may instead become an object which supplies information to visitors and researchers. The object becomes “culturally redefined” (Kopytoff 1986, 67) in the context of the museum.

Kopytoff also discusses sacred objects, specifically. It is however, important to note that Kopytoff’s definition differs from NAGPRA’s definition of sacred objects. This is yet another definition for sacred, ceremonial, or religious items which does may not coincide with some American Indian understandings of “sacred” or “objects”. For example, West discusses three ways in which understandings of objects from a Native perspective may differ from Western ways of understanding objects: “[t]his fusion of the profoundly spiritual with the otherwise purely physical, this primacy of the process of creating an object over the beautiful object itself, this utter inseparability of the object from the conduct of daily life” (2004, 9). This differs from Kopytoff’s definition of sacred, as a sacred object is an object which is separated from other parts of the environment – it is a singularized object (Kopytoff 1986, 73) In this way, for Kopytoff,

sacred objects are already different from commodities because of their singularity. However, this does not mean that they cannot become commodities through trade or sale. Sacred objects which become museum objects experience stages of their cultural biography throughout the process of becoming musealized. That is to say, once the objects are transferred from one culture to another the meanings of these objects may change depending on who is dealing with them.

Appadurai, like Kopytoff, addresses the idea of social lives of objects. However, Appadurai elaborates on the idea of object recontextualization by discussing different types of commodities. According to Appadurai, there are four types of commodities: commodities by destination, metamorphosis, diversion, and ex-commodities (Appadurai 1986, 16). Sacred objects which enter museums were perhaps at one point “commodities by metamorphosis”, which means they were objects “Intended for other uses that are placed into a commodity state” (Appadurai 1986, 16). Commodities, according to Appadurai (1986), are at one stage in their life – the rest of which may not consist of being a commodity. While discussing repatriated objects, it is interesting to examine the social life of that particular object. For example, a sacred basket may have been meant for a very specific, sacred, ceremonial, or religious purpose. The basket could have then been bought or traded by a collector, making it a commodity by metamorphosis. After accession, the object then enters another stage of its life as a museum object. Once the sacred object is repatriated, it is then recontextualized into the society it came from when it fulfills the purpose it was originally intended for, as an object which is used by present day religious adherents (U.S. Congress 1990, 168).

Fred Meyers elaborates Appadurai's discussion of recontextualization in the context of object movement, arguing that:

The expansion in theorizing exchange corresponds to a recognition of the many contexts – beyond those once imagined for supposedly stable simple societies – in which material culture moves, and of the way value is transformed through movement between contexts... This emphasis on movement underlies Appadurai's insights into the social life of things as they move between “regimes of value...” (Meyers 2001, 17-18)

Meyer's statement very simply explains Appadurai's argument about how objects' values change as they are recontextualized, or decontextualized, from one location to another, or from one phase in their social life to another.

Appadurai's discussion of aestheticization is also important to discuss in the context of sacred objects. Although Appadurai discusses “artifacts of the other” (1986, 28) and not sacred objects specifically, sacred objects could also represent a case of “commoditization by diversion” (Appadurai 1986, 28). Commodities by diversion are objects which are often “...in the domain of fashion, domestic display, and collecting in the modern West” (Appadurai 1986, 28). Baskets which enter museums are often from personal collections, as is discussed by Herold (2005) and in the examples of the baskets from the University of Denver Museum of Anthropology (National Park Service, National NAGPRA Database). The value of commodities by diversion “...in the art or fashion market, [are] accelerated or enhanced by placing objects and things in unlikely contexts” (Appadurai 1986, 28). Sacred objects become further aestheticized and decontextualized when placed on display.

Another important aspect of object theory is the idea of “object agency”, posited by Alfred Gell. The basis of Gell's argument is that things can act as social agents (Gell

1998, 17). This argument goes beyond objects having biographies or lives. Gell's theoretical point is that objects can make people do things; that they can "manifest" people's agency (Gell 1998, 20). This theoretical point can further illuminate the lives of objects, and the process of the decontextualization or recontextualization of sacred objects. One could understand changes in the storage of sacred objects from standard museum storage methods to indigenous standards of object care as an object's manifestation of a peoples' agency. One could therefore understand the repatriation of a sacred object as that object's manifestation of the tribe and the museum's agency. The recontextualization of an object from museum object to its community implies that the object has some sort of "power" or "agency". These objects are treated in a way which suggest that they are not mere inanimate objects.

However, there is an issue when discussing Gell's idea of object agency in conjunction with Native American epistemologies regarding objects, and especially religious, sacred, or ceremonial objects. Gell's argument postulates things as secondary agents – as agents only through people (Gell 1998). However, in non-Western epistemologies, objects may act as primary agents. They may be the "things" causing the "stuff" to happen. Sacred objects, when examined through non-Western epistemologies can be more than "manifestations of agency" (Gell 1998, 30) from a primary agent.

### **Alternative Ontologies and Epistemologies**

John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) introduced into popular culture the idea that perceptions of art, the ways people *see art*, are affected by the culture we come from (Berger 1972). Or as stated by Howes and Classen, "...it is inadequate to solely rely on

personal experience for understanding how people everywhere perceive the world. While humans share the same basic sensory capacities, these are developed and understood in different ways” (2014, 8-9). Recognizing the differences in the ways people see things ties into what Igor Kopytoff (1986) argued regarding the Western polarity of things and objects which does not exist in many other cultures. Different people perceive objects differently because the way we look at things, the way we see things, and the way we know things are shaped by our cultures.

Although Kopytoff, Appadurai, and Gell all discuss theories which give objects human-like attributes such as social lives (Appadurai 1986), cultural biographies (Kopytoff 1986), and agency (Gell 1998), these ideas do not fully address how many American Indian communities regard objects, and in particular sacred items. According to Coody-Cooper, “[m]useum charters have long focused on *objects*, a term patently offensive to many Native Americans because it refutes the idea of animism, or life within materials” (Coody-Cooper 2008, 65, emphasis added). Acknowledging the animistic nature of many American Indian worldviews provides a deeper understanding of what these objects, and the cultures these objects belong to, have experienced through their decontextualization from their original purposes to museum objects, and their recontextualization into their communities.

Animism is typically understood as a belief that inanimate objects, plants, and otherwise non-human “things” can have a soul. However, understanding it as a “relational epistemology” (Bird-David 1999) is especially helpful to begin the discussion of objects which can have “primary agency” as discussed by Gell (1998). Animism is a



relational epistemology because it is a way in which people relate to their environment (Bird-David 1999). As described by Bird-David,

[i]f the object of modernist epistemology is a totalizing scheme of separated essences, approached ideally from a separated viewpoint, the object of this animistic knowledge is understanding relatedness from a related point of view within the shifting horizons of the related viewer. (1999, S77)

The idea is that a modernist epistemology separates human essences from non-human essences, and also separates the “knower” from “the known” (Bird David 1999), while operating under an animist relational epistemology “[k]nowing... grows from and *is* maintaining relatedness with neighboring others”, where these “others” can be non-human as well as human (Bird David 1999, S78).

Applying this relational epistemology to sacred, ceremonial, or religious objects in museums, one can understand how when many of these objects are removed from their original context, they are known differently by the people who handle, display, and care for them. When the object exists in a new world-view, it no longer has a relationship with someone who can “talk” – as Bird-David describes talking with an object as a way of understanding that object (1999, S77)– with the object (Bird David 1999, S77) in order to know about it. Instead, an objectivist epistemology of the object as inanimate and as knowable is applied to the object in the context of a Western museum. This change in how people relate to an object once it enters a museum is one of the reasons why many Native American communities have issues with how objects are stored, cared for, and displayed in museums.

### **Postcolonialism. Critical Museum Theory, and Decolonizing the Museum**

Ania Loomba describes postcolonialism, "...not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (Loomba 2005, 16). Through this definition, Loomba places postcolonialism not only as a response to historical colonialism, but also as a response to the neo-colonialism which may occur in places where there is still an imperial or invasive presence. As a paradigm, postcolonialism uses concepts from philosophers such as Antonio Gramsci, Karl Marx, and Michel Foucault. Foucault's concept of power/ knowledge heavily influenced Edward Said's writing about western conceptions of the Oriental, which will be addressed later in this review. Additionally, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak challenges Foucaultian and Marxist ideas which essentialize oppressed populations (Spivak 1988). Spivak also uses the term "subaltern", from Gramsci's work on "subaltern classes" (1988, 283). As Loomba states, "...those who, following Gramsci, revived the term 'subaltern' in historical studies, did so in order to draw distinctions within colonised peoples, between the elite and the non-elite" (2005, 199). A paradigm that is heavily influenced by the study of power, and is used often in and developed by critical literary theory, has made its way into anthropological thought through anthropology's strong connections to colonialism.

Colonialism was, historically, integrated into disciplines such as anthropology and its home institution during colonial times – the museum (Willis 1972, 141). Colonial representations of "the other" have permeated museums in typological and evolutionary displays for many years. As summarized by Janet Marstine, "[f]rom their beginnings,

museums and their benefactors have plundered to create their collections and have interpreted objects from a Eurocentric perspective” (2006, 14). Non-western cultures are displayed as primitive and often frozen in time (Hill 2000); as if their culture is not alive, active, and changing. A popular example is the representation of American Indians in Science museums. American Indian cultures were often represented by mannequins inside glass cases in proximity to taxidermied animals that are also in glass cases (Hill 2000, 40). One can see how displaying people and animals in the same manner can be extremely offensive and problematic. However, through the influence of postmodernism, postcolonial literature, and social movements of historically oppressed people, museums are beginning to decolonize. Postcolonialism is seen by some as the child of postmodernism (Loomba 2005, 204). As stated by Mark Moberg,

[p]ostmodernists argue that humans cannot know about the world in ways that are not tinged by their particular perspective or bias. Knowledge is socially constructed...[p]ostmodern critics claim that the sciences have simply taken the knowledge claims of dominant groups...and privileged them above all other groups. (Moberg 2013, 301)

One can see how postcolonialism and its focus on deconstructing knowledge and power came from postmodernism’s ideological shift. This relates to the previous discussion of objectivist epistemologies from “dominant groups” being applied to indigenous objects. The postcolonial paradigm, spear-headed by Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha has had much to do with the ideological shift that is happening in museums. Postcolonialism has influenced the ways in which museums represent and interact with the cultures they have collected from and represent, and is important for the decolonization process in museums. Many central museum practices today are processes

through which decolonization can occur. Through the introduction of indigenous voices in institutions which are often associated with colonialism and Eurocentric, essentialist representations of non-Western culture, museums can continue the ongoing process of decolonization.

### **Primary Postcolonial Writers: Said, Spivak, and Bhabha**

In postcolonial literature, there are three major theoreticians who are cited continually; Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha. These scholars discuss western conceptions of “the Other”, the essentialization of subaltern peoples, and the need for a Third Space that is outside of the polarity within which conceptions of the colonized and colonizers exist. These scholars lay the framework within which critical museum theorists discuss the politics of representation.

In 1979, Edward Said published his book *Orientalism*. In this book, Said, influenced by Foucault, discusses the relationship between knowledge and power, and their connection to colonial rule. As noted by Ania Loomba, “[i]n many ways Said’s use of culture and knowledge to interrogate colonial power inaugurated colonial discourse studies” (2005, 44). In an introductory chapter of *Orientalism* titled “Knowing the Oriental”, Said discusses historic and contemporary examples of Westerners discussing their knowledge of, and colonial power over, Oriental societies. For instance, Said cites Arthur James Balfour’s speech to the House of Commons in Great Britain in 1910 which was meant to justify further imperial presence in Egypt. Said uses this speech to outline the way in which Balfour, as a self-described Westerner, takes western superiority for granted as a result of Britain’s possession of knowledge about Egypt:

[t]o have knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for “us” to deny autonomy to “it” – the Oriental country – since we know it and it exists, in a sense, as we know it. British knowledge of Egypt is Egypt for Balfour, and the burdens of knowledge make such questions as inferiority and superiority seem petty ones. Balfour nowhere denies British superiority and Egyptian inferiority; he takes them for granted as he describes the consequences of knowledge. (Said 1979, 393)

By knowing about Egypt, Britain has power over Egypt. Said explains the connection between knowledge and power through Balfour’s speech: “[k]nowledge to Balfour means surveying a civilization from its origins to its prime to its decline – and of course, it means being able to do that” (1979, 393). Said recognizes the notion of creating knowledge – being able to survey a civilization from the beginning to the end of time – as a form of power.

Additionally, Said notes that Orientalism is not just a justification or rationalization for colonialism; people have been dichotomizing the east and the west for centuries (1979, 398). Furthermore, not only is Orientalism rooted in centuries of previous ideas about the east and west, it was also still present in the 1970’s. Said uses Henry Kissinger’s discussion of the Third World and Harold W. Gliden’s article in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, both printed in 1972, as an example of Orientalist thinking occurring amongst his contemporaries. For example, Gliden’s article describes an essentialized understanding of “Oriental” behavior through oppositions with Western ways of thinking. Said summarizes Gliden:

...if ‘Westerners consider peace to be high on the scale of values’ and if ‘we have a highly developed consciousness of the value of time,’ this is not true of Arabs. ‘In fact,’ we are told, ‘in Arab tribal society (where Arab values originated), strife, not peace, was the normal state of affairs because raiding was one of the two main supports of the economy’. (1979, 404)

By critiquing his contemporaries, Said outlines the impact of Orientalist, dichotomized, and hierarchical thinking on contemporary (1970's) society. Through his discussion of the ways in which "the West" contrasts themselves with "the East", Said laid a foundation for understanding the dichotomized way the west (self) thinks about the east ("the Other") and upon which scholars could critique museum's representations of "the Other".

In 1988, Homi Bhabha wrote an article titled "The Commitment to Theory". This article contains many of Bhabha's core theoretical concepts that have influenced postcolonial anthropology. One of these is the concept of "Third Space". Bhabha writes that "[t]he intervention of the Third Space, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is continuously revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code" (1988, 21). Essentially, Bhabha sees the Third Space as existing somewhere in between the opposition of the colonized and the colonizer. The Third Space is a liminal place, where subalterns can discuss and mediate their own representation. According to Bhabha, the Third Space is where enunciation takes place, the only place where cultural difference can be explained (1988, 22). Bhabha stresses that we need not think in terms of poles of the colonized and the colonizers, but that we need to understand the hybrid nature of this relationship. He states, "It is in this space that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this hybridity, this 'Third Space', we may elude the politics of polarity..." (Bhabha 1988, 22).

The concept of Third Space is an important one for postcolonial theory. Not only does it step outside of binary oppositions of self and other, but it also begins to address the importance of agency and self-representation amongst oppressed subsets of the population. Additionally, Third Space allows for more flexibility between the idea of the colonized as victims of imperialism and as active survivors of colonial rule who are pushing against their oppressors and fighting for self-representation. Furthermore, when non-Western or indigenous peoples participate in or build their own museums, one could say they are acting in what Bhabha would call a “hybrid” manner; using a western institution to discuss, or “enunciate”, cultural difference and mediate their own representation.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also addresses representation of the subaltern. In her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Spivak uses Antonio Gramsci’s concept of the subaltern to explain the essentialization of the subaltern, and the extent to which very oppressed people can know and talk about their situation. Her argument is that “[t]he subaltern cannot speak” (Spivak 1988, 308). Spivak addresses the Foucaultian and Marxist idea: that “...the oppressed, if given the chance (the problem of representation cannot be bypassed here), and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics (a Marxist thematic is at work here) can speak and know their conditions” (1988, 283). Spivak argues that saying the oppressed can speak and know their conditions implies an essentialization of the subaltern: “...a postrepresentationalist vocabulary hides an essentialist agenda” (Spivak 1988, 285). She argues that marginalized women are more oppressed than the idea of “the third world” or “the Other” implies. She uses the example

of the Sati, the Hindu widow who burns on her husband's funeral pyre, to demonstrate how subaltern women are oppressed by both the patriarchy and the colonizers. Spivak notes,

[i]t is, rather, that both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (Spivak 1988, 287)

Spivak's discussion of the subaltern, not as a homogenous group of oppressed people, but as a complex unit which contains a hierarchy within itself, challenges essentialist and romanticized notions of the subaltern (Loomba 2005, 195) ascribed by western thinkers such as Foucault. This concept is important to museum anthropology because of the multiple groups of people that are represented in museums. It is important to recognize that one cannot just talk about "indigenous representation" or "representation of oppressed people" in museums as one homogenous idea.

### **Postcolonial Theory Critiqued and Revisited**

Although Said, Spivak, and Bhabha are essential to understanding the postcolonial paradigm, they have been critiqued by many, as has the entire paradigm. Spivak's argument, that the subaltern cannot speak, raises issues within postcolonial discourse. As stated by Loomba, "...her insistence on subaltern 'silence' is problematic if adopted as the definitive statement about colonial relations", and in some cases denies female agency (2005, 195-196). Additionally, Benita Parry critiques Spivak in much the same way, stating that "Spivak in her own writings severely restricts (eliminates?) the space in which the colonized can be written back into history..." (1995, 40). Spivak is critiqued for the denial of subaltern agency, the agency of the brown woman, who can



only be heard, according to Spivak, through the female intellectual (1988, 308). Although Spivak placed importance on the idea that oppressed populations are not homogenous, she seems to be homogenizing the subaltern by saying the subaltern cannot speak.

Additionally, Loomba discusses the colonial subject in Bhabha's writing. She points out that even though the colonial subject, according to Bhabha, is supposed to embody hybridity, the "...colonial subject projected in his work is in fact curiously universal and homogeneous—that is to say he could exist anywhere in the colonial world" (Loomba 2005, 150). Additionally, Loomba discusses Benita Parry's critique of Bhabha's concept of hybridity, stating "...current theories of 'hybridity' work to downplay the bitter tension and the clash between the colonisers and the colonised and therefore misrepresent the dynamics of anti-colonial struggle" (2005, 152). Loomba also outlines critiques of Said's Orientalism, stating many critics note that "...Said's analysis concentrates, almost exclusively, on canonical Western literary texts" and also, "...Said ignores the self-representations of the colonised and focus on the imposition of colonial power rather than on resistances to it" (2005, 46). This is also a theme in museum representation. Indigenous museum professionals and theorists recognize that there needs to be a balance of representation of colonialism and survivance by the colonized (Lonetree 2012, 174).

Postcolonial intellectuals, broadly, and postcolonialism as a paradigm are also criticized. Arif Dirlik notes that postcolonial intellectuals are "...Third World intellectuals who have arrived in First World academe, whose preoccupation with postcoloniality is an expression not so much of agony over identity, as it often appears, but of newfound

power” (Dirlik 1997, 62). Postcoloniality, Dirlik argues, has come out of newfound power of Third World intellectuals who are producing knowledge within an elite First World institution. One can see how this is problematic for the representation of subaltern peoples who are not participating in their own representation within the “academe” – who are portrayed as silent by Spivak in her argument that the subaltern cannot speak. Additionally, Dirlik criticizes postcolonialism for not including a conversation about global capitalism (1997, 73). Putting it more “bluntly”, Dirlik argues that “... ‘postcoloniality’ is designed to avoid making sense of the current crisis and, in the process, to cover up the origins of postcolonial intellectuals in a Global Capitalism of which they are not so much victims as beneficiaries” (1997, 74). Dirlik’s acknowledgement of the complicated nature of intellectuals working within elite institutions who are discussing the representation of non-western peoples by elites sparks an interesting conversation regarding representation. Is representation of the subaltern the duty of the female academic, as Spivak suggests? Although critical museum theorists are not commonly discussing the representation of the story of the Sati, many would argue that representation should be a collaborative project between the museum professional and the community they are representing.

### **The Critical Theory and Postcolonial Critique of Museums**

As noted above, museums have classically been institutions where colonizers displayed the culture of the colonized. Any scholarly book or article which addresses the history of museum practices usually includes a discussion of museums coming out of the “age of imperialism” or as colonial spaces (Ames 1992, 3; Lidchi, 1997, 16; Marstine

2006, 8-9; MacDonald 2006, 85; Lonetree 2012, 1). Many use the classic example of the Pitt Rivers Museum's typological displays exhibiting 'primitive' cultures in an evolutionary manner (Bouquet 2012, Lonetree 2012, Ames 1992) in order to demonstrate the colonial and essentializing nature of museums. Through the postmodern and postcolonial critique, new museum theorists have begun to address the colonial nature of museums and have discussed ways in which museums can begin the process of decolonization.

Museum professionals and theorists such as Janet Marstine, Henrietta Lidchi, Amy Lonetree, Richard Hill, Michael Ames, and Sharon MacDonald have written much about the postcolonial critique of museums. One can see how postcolonialism has greatly influenced critical museum theory, which is also called new museum theory (Marstine 2006) in Janet Marstine's outline of New Museum Theory. She states:

...though museum workers commonly naturalize their policies and procedures as professional practice, the decisions these workers make reflect underlying value systems that are encoded in institutional narratives...[t]heorists call for the transformation of the museum from a site of worship and awe to one of discourse and critical reflection that is committed to examining unsettling histories with sensitivity to all parties...[n]ew museum theory is about decolonizing, giving those represented control of their own cultural heritage. (Marstine 2006, 5)

Critical museum theorists are focused on giving voice to the people who are being represented, and frequently, those represented in museums are groups who have experienced colonial oppression. Questions of representation are central to postcolonial theory, and although Spivak, Bhabha, and Said are often discussing representation in literature, one can draw parallels between the representation of cultures in Western institutions such as museums and the representation of cultures in Western literature.

Museum theorists, in a similar manner to Said, draw on Foucaultian ideas regarding the relationship between power and knowledge. Henrietta Lidchi argues that by using a Foucaultian model, “it is impossible to dissociate the supposedly neutral and enlightened world of scholarship on one hand from the world of politics and power on the other” (1997, 198). Furthermore, she discusses the relationship of power/ knowledge to theories of visibility. She argues that through employing a Foucaultian analysis, “...being made visible is an ambiguous pleasure, connected to the operation of power” (Lidchi 1997, 195). Eileen Hooper-Greenhill’s book, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (1992) and Janet Marstine’s introduction to *New Museum Theory and Practice* (2006) also use Foucaultian ideas to discuss the history of museums. However, Marstine also acknowledges the limitations of a Foucaultian analysis of museums, noting that this analysis, “...depicts the museum as conspiratorial, consciously engaging in duplicity to maintain systems of power” and that it “...portrays audiences as manipulated pawns, without agency” (2006, 22). Critical museum theorists, however, recognize the ability of museums to change and decolonize their practices. In the United States, much of this decolonization has taken place within the context of American Indian representation in museums.

One way in which museums are decolonizing is through collaboration with source communities. Mary Bouquet gives examples of source communities collaborating with museums to mediate their representation (2012, 145-148). Through collaboration with source communities, museums are able to change the way they handle objects and representation. Lonetree discusses how “...collaborative partnerships between Native

Americans and mainstream museums have increased over the last 30 years” (2012, 4). This shows a connection to the beginnings of postcolonialism as a paradigm, since Said’s *Orientalism* was published in 1979. However, it is also important to note that the postcolonial critique of museums was happening during a time when movements such as the self-identification movement of American Indians and other civil rights movements were taking place in the 1960’s and 1970’s.

Another way in which museums are decolonizing is through the repatriation of human remains and material objects to their original communities. In the United States, repatriation is facilitated by NAGPRA, however some of these repatriations occur outside of the United States, as noted by Bouquet (2012). Coody Cooper discusses how Samuel Morton, a physical anthropologist in the United States collected six hundred skulls in the 1840s “...primarily through military sources” to conduct a study which would “...prove that white people were superior to others” (2008, 86-87). These studies “...helped pave the way for the undermining of the rights of non-whites, which included further taking of American Indian lands, relocating populations, and encouraging other genocidal activities such as curtailment of supplies, vaccinations, and other humane services” (Coody Cooper 2008, 87). As stated previously, the repatriation of human remains and material objects helps to undo some of the atrocities that were committed by colonizers and scientists. Through repatriation, museums can start to resemble a collaborative “contact zone” as Bouquet (2012, 145-148) stated as opposed to an exclusive, elitist, colonial institution.

Furthermore, multivocality, shared authority, and indigenous/ non-western curation methods are being adopted by many western museums as they acknowledge the

need to include the people they are representing in the curation and exhibition processes. Many museum scholars write about the importance of including the voice of those represented in the museum (Ames 1992, Lidchi 1997, Marstine 2006, Lonetree 2012). Postcolonial critiques of the museum have helped integrate voices in the source community and have assisted in the integration of “other perspectives and new voices” (Lidchi 1997, 205). Additionally, Christina Kreps (2006) and Janet Marstine (2006) have discussed non-western and indigenous curation methods in museums. Janet Marstine discusses methods which museums such as the University of Denver Museum of Anthropology uses in order to treat objects it has in a manner that is respectful to the Native American communities they originated from. This includes keeping human remains and sacred objects in a separate room with limited access and the suppression of the fire system so that rituals such as smudging, the burning of tobacco, sage, and sweetgrass, can take place (Marstine 2006, 20). Western museums adopting non-Western and indigenous methods of curation are clearly influenced by critical museum theory and a response to the postcolonial critique of museums which gives “...those represented control of their own cultural heritage” (Marstine 2006, 5).

It is important to acknowledge that museums are still dealing with colonialist history as well as with instances of neo-colonialism. As Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Nash state, NAGPRA entails financial and spiritual burdens, and also creates disputes over location for reburial and over ownership (2010, 99). Additionally, some scholars think museums are not going as far as they can to discuss their colonialist history, and believe

they need to discuss “...the hard truths of colonization in exhibitions in an effort to promote healing and understanding” (Lonetree 2012, 25).

### **Conclusion**

Alternative ontologies, object theory, postcolonialism, and critical museum theory are all relevant when discussing who has and who should have control over cultural heritage. By discussing Western understandings of object agency, biography, and social lives alongside the discussion of alternative ontologies and the relational epistemology of animism, one can begin to understand how objects become decontextualized upon entering museums. Furthermore, postcolonialism and its influence on new and critical museum theory begin the discussion of how to decolonize the museum, and bring the voices of those who are represented in museums into exhibiting and caring for material culture.

These theoretical frameworks supported a research methodology that focused on the problem of how different ways of knowing and being could exist under one roof. Mainstream museums such as the DMNS tend to operate under a Western knowledge system wherein knowledge is for everyone, and can be gained through seeing and studying inanimate objects. The ways in which museums care for non-Western sacred, ceremonial, and religious objects, and whether or not they incorporate non-Western ontologies and epistemologies into object care are telling of how and if the museum values collaboration, co-curation, and decolonization in museums.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Research Problem**

This goal of this project is to explore how mainstream museum staff incorporate indigenous curation for American Indian sacred, religious, and ceremonial objects into mainstream collections care and management. I designed the project by applying concepts from New and Critical Museology, as well as techniques and concepts from discourse analysis, to ethnographic research methods including participant observation and semi-structured interviewing. Through the presentation and examination of data and literature, I argue that including indigenous curation in museums aids in cultural revitalization and reclamation for Native Americans, and that incorporating indigenous curatorial methods and alternative ontologies and epistemologies aids in the decolonization process in museums.

### **Research Design**

#### **New Museology**

As a project that discusses the outcome of collaboration and consultation with source community groups, I employed concepts from the New Museology when designing this project. The New Museology is a reaction to traditional museological practices that privileged objects, “museum methods” (Vergo 1989, 3), and the authority of the curator. Traditional museology is didactic, authoritative, and exclusionary. The New Museological approach instead focuses on the museum’s relationships with the



communities they are situated in and the communities the objects in the museum come from. Within a new museological framework, museums privilege their social and political roles within the community (Vergo 1989, 3; Jordanova 1989, 40).

One component of the social roles of museums is engaging with source communities. This research project was designed to discover how and why museum staff at a mainstream, Western museum, the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, incorporate indigenous curation into their collections care and management for American Indian sacred, ceremonial, and religious objects. As discussed in the literature review, Indigenous Curation includes non-western models of museums, curatorial methods, and concepts of cultural heritage preservation (Kreps 2009, 194). Source community collaboration and consultation is necessary for the implementation of curatorial methods in mainstream museums to ensure that the methods implemented are actual curatorial methods from the tribe and not speculation from museum staff.

#### Decolonizing and Critical Museology

A decolonizing museum approach focuses on confronting historical trauma (Lonetree 2012). The postcolonial critique of museums problematizes the western museum model, and often considers indigenous epistemologies, methodologies, and ontologies more appropriate in mainstream museums that house indigenous items (Marstine 2006, 5). The implementation of indigenous curatorial methods into a museum is a recognition of the existence of alternative ontologies, as well as a way to address historical trauma when sacred objects cannot be returned to their communities.

Additionally, a critical museology suggests that museum scholars and professionals problematize “dominant models of museums” (Shelton 2013, 18) and seeks to decolonize museums through “continuous process” (Shelton 2013, 13-14). By focusing on the museum staff at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science and seeking to understand non-Western, non-standard collections care and management methods, this project is methodologically critical and challenges classical understandings of museum collections care and management.

### Positionality

As a white anthropologist studying indigenous curatorial methods, the influence of indigenous activism, indigenous ontologies, and critical museology on institutional narratives about object care in museums, it is important to point out that I am not entrenched in any indigenous worldviews myself. I grew up in a few fairly culturally homogenous areas the Midwest, and Native American issues were peripheral if at all present in my education until the last three years of my undergraduate studies. Since that time, I have felt it is incredibly important for all people, but especially those whose careers directly affect Native Americans, to acknowledge, accept, and try to aid in what will be discussed as “restorative justice” in the analysis chapter to address the difficult histories outlined previously. I am an academic of museums and a museum professional, and hope to contribute to a broader discussion of the importance of multiple knowledge frameworks existing in museums as institutions.

## **Research Goals and Objectives**

The overarching problem that drove this research is “How and why do museum professionals incorporate indigenous curation for American Indian sacred, religious, and ceremonial objects into a secular, mainstream museum?”. To answer this broad question, I defined three research goals:

- 1) Identify examples of indigenous curation being used at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science.
- 2) Discuss how and why indigenous curation is a form of ethical and culturally appropriate practice within the Denver Museum of Nature and Science.
- 3) Discuss how and why museum professionals at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science reconcile the use of “best practices” and secular, mainstream collections care and management with indigenous curation of American Indian religious, sacred, and ceremonial objects.

The research methods employed to fulfill these research goals are discussed below.

## **Research Design and Methods**

### **Population and Sample**

The population studied for this project included people who currently work or have previously worked in the anthropology collections department at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. I used non-probability sampling to select these informants as key-informants who would provide useful information based on their experience and job position within the museum.

## Semi-Structured Interviews

In order to answer the research questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with six members of the museum staff at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, including the curator and NAGPRA officer, the current collections manager and NAGPRA coordinator, the former collections manager and NAGPRA coordinator, two collections assistants, and the NAGPRA research assistant. Each informant was asked a similar set of questions with varying follow up questions depending on their position in the museum.

Many of these questions were derived from categories that were outlined in the article “Merging Traditional Indigenous Curation Methods with Modern Museum Standards of Care,” which outlines ways in which the National Museum of Natural History merges indigenous curation and Western care methods (Flynn and Hull-Walski 2001). The authors outlined “where” one might find indigenous curation in a museum, including changes in terminology, changes in storage methods, restrictions to access, offerings and ceremonial feedings, privacy, handling and use of objects, preservation of ethnographic information, and avoidance of preservation (Flynn and Hull-Walski 2001). In addition to asking each informant about indigenous curatorial methods, each informant was asked why they think these changes are taking place. This question was asked to gauge the informants’ general attitudes towards consultation, collaboration, and indigenous curation, as well as to engage the informant in a discussion of museum ethics. Each informant signed an informed consent form that asked if they could be recorded.

The interviews were recorded using my smartphone using the application Mini Recorder and were transcribed, word for word, in Microsoft Word.

### Participant Observation

I worked as a volunteer and intern in the Anthropology department at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science from May 2015 until December 2015. During these seven months, I took notes on what I witnessed and learned as an intern while I catalogued, researched, and rehoused objects for an IMLS Oceanic grant. As a part of participant observation, I also conducted unstructured interviews with museum staff to gather additional data on how museum staff care for religious, sacred, and ceremonial objects. Unstructured interviews were also used to gather information about the basic workings of the department.

Participant observation and unstructured interviewing supplemented more formal semi-structured interviews to attain an understanding about the individuals and the institution that may have not otherwise been given. Notes were taken in a small field journal and expanded on later. Events of interest that I observed during my internship included walking tours of the new (2014) 63,000 square foot Avenir Collections Center – built and supported by grants from the Avenir Foundation as well as voter approved “Better Denver bonds” (Denver Museum of Nature and Science 2016) – by curators and other museum staff, and discussions of how to name non-Western objects in the digital catalogue software, EMu.

## Data Analysis

### Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis consists of looking for patterns, repetitions, and connections in discourse to find meaning in “ideas, issues, and themes” (Gee 2014). From the transcribed interviews and field notes, I looked for and identified patterns, repetitions, and connections in the text when museum staff discussed non-Western object care, as well as when museum staff discussed their personal attitudes and opinions of non-Western object care practices. I read through the transcriptions of each interview, as well as my field notes multiple times to find emerging themes, or what Bernard calls “analytic categories” or “potential themes” (Bernard 2006, 492) inductively. After I identified emerging themes from the data, I used a pile-sorting technique (Bernard 2006, 494) to identify groups of emerging themes that would later become themes or “codes” which I could then apply to my data. In addition to this inductive method, I used predetermined codes to identify when actions were taken by staff because of NAGPRA, when staff were going beyond NAGPRA, and to find examples of indigenous curation.

I also utilized Gee’s concept of social language, in which “words are...always acquired within and licensed by specific social and historically shaped practices representing the *values* and *interests* of distinctive groups of people” (Gee 2014, 67) as deductive codes to identify which aspects of discourse were connected to either indigenous curation or typically Western collections care and management methods. After general themes were found throughout the data, I utilized the idea of “world building” to understand how staff in the Anthropology department at the Denver Museum

of Nature and Science bring together two seemingly different world-views – indigenous curation and Western collections care and management. Gee states, “[w]e always actively use spoken and written language to create or build the world of activities..., identities ..., and institutions...around us” (Gee 2011, 85).

#### Discourse Analysis Example

Agnes Weiyun He demonstrates how through language “*institutional, professional activities* are carried out...” (2003, 439). She asks, “How does the way in which participants use language reenact, maintain, or alter their institutional roles and identities? How are institutional activities accomplished through verbal and nonverbal interaction?” (He 2003, 439).

He (2003) demonstrates this with the example of a conversation between a student (Susan) who desires to find an appropriate major which will help her get into medical school and her academic advisor (Neil). After relaying the conversation between student and advisor, He provides an analysis of the conversation and argues that “...Neil is not merely a passive recipient of Susan’s report. Rather he actively anticipates her account... sympathetically collaborates with her in her account, and cautiously provides his assessment of the situation with discrediting Helen, his colleague” (2003, 443). He then continues the analysis and argues that

Institutions such as a university academic advising center do not just exist in the form of physical structure, personnel, and various rule books such as the university catalog, written policies regarding course credits and so forth. They are lived by their members through seemingly routine actions, interactions, and activities. Knowledge and knowledgeability regarding institutional structures and constraints, institutional goals, and institutional roles is produced and reproduced through the details of the participants moment-by-moment conduct...they are

actively engaged in reconstructing the institutional nature of their encounter.  
(2003, 444)

This example demonstrates the type of information I examined and coded for during my discourse analysis. I sought to understand what language is used to discuss the institutions of indigenous curation and Western museums, and to understand how these languages demonstrate and contribute to staff members museological practices at the DMNS.

### **Conclusion**

Combining ideas from new museology and decolonizing museology with discourse analysis honed the focus of the project to explore how museum staff at the DMNS actively discuss ways in which they are participating within a decolonizing, critical museological framework that champions the needs of source communities. Asking the museum staff for examples of indigenous curation, as well as utilizing the outlined methodologies to form my questions formulated a discussion through which both concrete examples of indigenous curation and ideas about staff participation in consultation and implementation could be explored.



## **CHAPTER SIX: DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

The original question of this project was to examine how and why the DMNS staff incorporate indigenous curation for American Indian sacred, religious, and ceremonial objects into Western collections care and management. I explored this question through three research goals: 1) to identify examples of indigenous curation being used at the DMNS; 2) to discuss how and why indigenous curation is a form of ethical and culturally appropriate practice at the DMNS; and 3) to discuss how and why museum professionals at the DMNS reconcile the use of “best practices” and secular, Western collections care and management with indigenous curation of American Indian religious, sacred, and ceremonial objects. It is apparent from background research and through the analysis presented that DMNS is able to incorporate indigenous curation into their collections care and management, and that they do so because it is ethical and culturally appropriate.

In this chapter, I first present examples of indigenous curation that were discussed by museum staff. I then move into an analysis of staff discourse that demonstrates how and why indigenous curation is both ethical and culturally appropriate at the DMNS. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion and analysis of the staff discourse that demonstrates how the staff at DMNS reconcile the idea of “best practices” with indigenous curation through a discourse of world building. This discourse of world

building highlights how the staff are able to reconcile these seemingly clashing worldviews – through an open and adaptive museum practice.

### **Examples of Indigenous Curation**

#### Sequestering the Sacred, Ceremonial, and Religious Items

One example of indigenous curation that was discussed frequently by museum staff was the physical sequestering of the Native American religious, sacred, and ceremonial objects into the Culturally Sensitive Storage Room, or CSSR. When asked if DMNS staff has had to negotiate or reconcile traditional care methods with conservation best practices or standard collections and care policies, Chip Colwell, one of the Anthropology Curators of the DMNS stated:

Excerpt 1:

CC: ...the highest level of the negotiation is this idea of even sequestering them ...once things are sequestered, as I'm saying, our policy is essentially, we strongly limit, stringently limit access. We don't research them, you know, we just stabilize them and let them be until we're told. And if they're really important items that have very specific care requirements, typically those items are claimed for repatriation. And since 2007 we've essentially returned almost everything that's been requested. (Personal Interview, July 22, 2015).

The NAGPRA Research Assistant, Dawn Rewolinski, also discussed the CSSR as a form of indigenous curation:

Excerpt 2:

JS: Um, so do you know of any instances of changes in storage methods...

DR: Yeah...

JS: Which were made to accommodate requests based on religion? And can you think of any examples?

DR: Yeah, um I mean certainly just even having a sacred room in the first place is a step forward. (Personal Interview, December 14, 2015)

The collections assistant, Bethany Williams, had a similar response to this question:

Excerpt 3:

BW: So, the major thing is that our, the sacred objects that have been identified by tribal members, by designated tribal members, they do consultations and then we figure out how to best treat the objects. So, some of them, they're kept in a completely separate room, sometimes they need to be in separate drawers, sometimes it's they need to be specially covered with something like muslin, or a different fabric, or they need to be wrapped very specially. But a lot of that is that they need...most of them that have been requested for special storage, they are in a room that is locked separately from the rest of the collection. (Personal Interview, July 30, 2015)

The accompanying ethnographic information associated with these objects and gained through consultation is also sequestered from the rest of the documentation. In our interview, Rewolinski stated:

Excerpt 4:

DR: ...So, I do feel like it's pretty...yeah and I mentioned there's a lot of documents that are like, all this information is confidential that's why we keep it locked up. It's for use only for the anthropology department and certainly only certain people in the anthropology department...there is limited access with that.

(Personal Interview, December 14, 2015)

These staff members understand sequestering the collection both physically and intellectually as a form of indigenous curation. From this data, it is evident that separating these items and limiting access to the curator, the Collections Manager, and the NAGPRA research assistant is not something that would be thought of as Western museum policy, but is something that has become a part of the fabric of the DMNS. The museum staff are consciously incorporating an alternative way of storing these objects.

#### Smudging and Turning off Fire Suppression

Another common example of indigenous curation discussed by museum staff was turning off the fire suppression so individuals could smudge an area, room, or person by burning sage or sweetgrass. One collections assistant stated that when one tribe came to visit, they turned off the fire suppression in case they wanted to smudge anything:

Excerpt 5:

JP: ...but we have in the past had Native Americans smudge rooms before they look at items and that's just part of, you know, their culture, they feel like they need to do that, so we respect that even though we have fire suppression in place, and we actually, when \_\_\_\_\_ were here, we didn't know if they were going to do

that, um, so we had to shut down all the fire suppression on that entire floor.

(Personal Interview, July 17, 2015)

Fire suppression is in place in most collections storage spaces to prevent damage to objects. This is an example of indigenous curation where the museum compromises what would be considered “best practices” to have a culturally appropriate standard of care. The fire suppression is turned off in order to accommodate an indigenous curatorial method.

#### Cornmeal and Other Organics

When looking for examples of indigenous curation, it is useful to examine practices that might contrast with the museum’s standards of care. Having organic material with the collection is an example of this, as previously discussed with the example at the University of Denver Museum of Anthropology (Kreps 2003, 97). Colwell stated cornmeal is often placed with Katsina items (Personal Interview, July 22, 2015). From a preservation point of view, storing objects with organic materials can be problematic as these materials can attract pests. However, through careful Integrated Pest Management, or IPM, the museum staff have done this for objects stored with organic materials including cornmeal, sweetgrass, and sage. This was explained by the former collections manager of the museum, Isabel Tovar:

Excerpt 6:

IT: Well I mean I think definitely having um, having uh, sweet grass and sage and things left in cabinets. Um, normally that is something we would not...in terms of a best practice, conservation stand point you wouldn’t be bringing in organics

from outside and sitting them next to things. Um, or remains. And so that aspect of was...we knew that by honoring that we were just going to then need to be more vigilant...essentially was the trade-off. And then we would just...we made sure that we had an IPM system in place and that we did monthly trips around and we just kept an eye on things so if for some reason something had turned into food that we would catch it in time. (Personal Interview, September 17, 2015)

In this example, the DMNS makes compromises by utilizing “vigilant” Integrated Pest Management, and reconciles the classic understanding of best practices, which Isabel outlines as not “bringing in organics from outside and sitting them next to things” with indigenous curatorial methods. Tovar recognizes the potential problems that could arise from storing organic materials with the items and is aware of competing worldviews.

#### Moving Objects Yearly

Another example of indigenous curation is incorporating the request to move particular objects yearly. Melissa Bechhoefer, the current collections manager, discussed an example of one tribe who requested certain objects have movement once a year:

Excerpt 7:

MB: ...and they definitely had some requests of objects...it wasn't necessarily storage...there were definitely things they asked me to remove and handle on a regular basis to make sure that they have some life and you know gain a little bit of movement so that's kind of handling a little bit. (Personal Interview, July 23, 2015)

This is an example, similar to smudging, where codified “best practices” may not be in line with indigenous curatorial methods, yet the museum staff still incorporate these requests. Typical best practices favor preservation in perpetuity, and many museum professionals would not consider moving an object more often than it would normally move for purposes of transport or exhibition a best practice as it increases the likelihood of damage to the object. Storing objects in perpetuity is a value held by the DMNS which I witnessed during my internship at the museum. During my internship at the DMNS I made custom cavity mounts for many objects in the Oceanic collection and took photographs of these objects to put into the digital record to limit future handling. With these particular objects however, the staff favor the indigenous curatorial method of handling the items on a regular basis and giving them movement.

#### Disassembling Katsinas

Disassembling objects may seem like the last thing a museum would want to do. However, when an object as a whole embodies a spirit, it may need to be taken apart to be stored appropriately:

Excerpt 8:

CC: ...right off the top of my head is the Katsina friends or the Katsina masks, and a few other ceremonial items, essentially, they... according to Hopi’s and other pueblos they should be disassembled. Because if they’re assembled then the spirit is essentially there, and not at rest, so essentially there is some negotiating, I think back in the nineties to disassemble those and store them disassembled rather than all assembled. (Colwell, Personal Interview, July 22, 2015)

The “best practice” for many museums would be to attempt to keep the object as one whole piece and try to preserve it in perpetuity. However, as Colwell states, when the Katsina are assembled, the spirit is still there and “not at rest”. Some objects aren’t meant to stay preserved forever, and in this case may not be appropriate as a complete item while being stored in a museum.

Not only is the tangible culture being preserved, the intangible cultural heritage associated with these objects is also being curated in a way in which best practices might not allow for.

### **Staff Discourse: The Social Languages of Indigenous Curation and Western Museums**

The staff at the DMNS recognize the nature of Western museums, and discuss these ideas when talking about implementing indigenous curation, and especially when discussing the separation of culturally sensitive items from the rest of the collection. They also recognize the ways in which indigenous curation may not coincide with the worldview associated with Western museums, and have developed a staff culture and discourse of recognition of diversity and acceptance when discussing indigenous curation within the DMNS. This social language contributes to and demonstrates the staffs’ willingness to understand alternative worldviews and accept them into the collections care and management for sacred, ceremonial, and religious objects, as well as human remains.



## The Social Language of Western Museums

The social language of Western museums is complex, yet can be simply identified within the context of the implementing indigenous curatorial methods. “Best practices”, as discussed previously, is an understanding of what is expected of museum staff and how they treat objects within a Western museum setting. Ideas of what a museum should do for its community go beyond object handling, as the DMNS staff discuss “the public’s” expectation of having unlimited access to knowledge. There is an ontological clash between Western understandings of knowledge and object care within a Western museum context and indigenous curation. From a Western perspective, knowledge should be accessible by everyone. From many indigenous perspectives, however, some knowledge is meant to be kept private. Additionally, there seems to be an understanding in the Western museum context that all objects are cared for in the same way, and should not require special handling and storage. DMNS staff members understand these differences and discuss them when talking about the practice of implementing indigenous curatorial methods. Tovar states:

Excerpt 9:

IT: ... I mean that’s the challenge of it right, you know? You deal, you’re doing um, like this scientific overlay over human culture. And human culture is based on I mean...

JS: belief systems?

IT: Yeah, it’s belief systems. So you can’t...I mean it was one of the things that we always kind of argued about...um, hopefully nicely, with our colleagues, and

the fact that anthropology was put in a natural history setting because of its history. You know, the roots of, you know, treating different people that way, as animals really...now you find yourself with people. If you're in anthropology in a natural history setting you have...you're having to argue with people who handle rocks and leaves and lizards and whatever, and they don't understand why you have these special requirements but you're sitting there going "I'm talking to a real, live person. I have real, live people coming in and telling me about their things". (Personal Interview, September 17, 2015)

This excerpt explains the complexities of two differing worldviews existing simultaneously in a Western, Natural History Museum setting. When caring for objects within the zeitgeist of the Western Museum, object care is not based around non-Western "belief systems", but Western, scientific systems of understanding the world and accessing knowledge. In this excerpt, Tovar explains how it is difficult to separate belief systems from object care in a museum setting, saying it is not easily done when there is a "real, live person" telling you about their things. Another interesting facet of this excerpt is Tovar's understanding of to whom these objects belong. She states people are telling her about "their things" – not the museum's things, and not "the public's" things. This is an interesting contrast to the worldview of Western museums, which assumes objects in museums belong to everyone when they are held in the public trust.

This idea is echoed by Tovar and other staff members who discuss how many people expect access to all knowledge and objects within a Western museum setting. Tovar explained how while giving tours of collections spaces to the public, many were

perplexed by the idea of a separate storage area for culturally sensitive objects. Since the museum is a public institution, members of the public believe they should be able to see these items (Personal Interview, September 17, 2015). “The public” often assumes if a museum holds these objects, they are owned by the public. This was also evident from the curator, Colwell, who discussed the idea of these objects being held “in the public trust” and recognizes a negotiation of value systems:

Excerpt 10:

CC: Right, so, the museum, if we’re holding items in the public trust, in the public interest, um, these collections are for everyone, how do we justify not allowing anyone who wants to see these objects, you know? So, just even that decision [sequestering sacred items] is certainly a negotiation of competing values and interest systems, right? (Personal Interview, July 22, 2015)

This access to knowledge is another facet of the institution of Western museums which complicates the implementation of indigenous curatorial methods, especially when “the public” expects these institutions to hold and display knowledge for them to access whenever they please. Regardless of this, the staff at the DMNS understand these issues and communicate their ideas about them within a particular discourse of accepting indigenous curation.

Another facet of the understanding of a Western museum worldview is evident when staff discuss how the collection is organized. Classically, many museums organize objects by type. From a museum perspective, this maximizes storage space and simplifies the search process for visiting researchers who would like to research all of “x” type of

object they are researching. However, in the new storage facility the anthropology collection is moving into, the staff are organizing items by culture. Steve Nash, Curator and Department Chair of Anthropology at the DMNS gave tours of the collections space this summer. During my field research, he explained to the touring groups that the old way of storing objects by type was selfish of museums, and they are now storing objects by culture to make it easier for source communities to access their cultures' items. This was echoed by Tovar, who noted most of the researchers visiting the collections at the DMNS, ranging from twenty to fifty a year, were indigenous researchers. Therefore, organizing items by culture in the preservation facility makes more sense as she previously spent time going back and forth to "thirty different locations to see their things" (Personal Interview, September 17, 2015) when items were organized by type. The practice of storing objects by type, a Western museum concept, has been recognized as not culturally appropriate, or practical for visiting researchers, and the DMNS is changing their storage methods in order to make these objects more accessible to source communities.

### Understanding Indigenous Worldviews

One of the common themes in the staffs' discourse surrounding indigenous curation is the recognition of differing sensibilities between Western museums and indigenous peoples regarding object care. This is evident when museum staff discuss storing objects in plastic, and most of the staff members recognize the idea that many tribes and organizations prefer to not store objects in this manner. Colwell discussed this in the context of storing human remains before they are repatriated, stating:

Excerpt 11:

CC: ...I guess with human remains too we switched from like, um, just to go back to that last question, we took everything out of plastic, for example, and put all of the human remains in muslin. Um, some tribes prefer certain colors, like a red, I think some of the tribes might've requested the red cloth. (Personal Interview, July 22, 2015)

From this excerpt, it is evident that at some point, prior to repatriation, human remains were stored in plastic and were subsequently taken out of plastic and stored under muslin or other types of cloth at the request of tribes. This requires the staff to understand plastic is not a culturally appropriate storage material for American Indian human remains.

Tovar also discussed the issue with storing human remains in plastic in the context of Integrated Pest Management, stating: "the problem is that you're putting something in a plastic bag and usually community members do not want that because you're suffocating the item or the entity" (Personal Interview, September 17, 2015). A popular method of pest removal in museums is to seal infested objects in an airtight plastic bag and deep-freeze them to kill any pests. This would not be an appropriate method for many tribes and organizations and Tovar explains her understanding of this in the excerpt above. There is an understanding in the discourses of the former collections manager and the curator that many of these sacred, ceremonial, and religious items, as well as human remains, should be able to breath and not be suffocated by airtight, plastic storage. This is different from a Western perspective, where objects are usually

understood as inanimate. As discussed in Chapter Four, this is not the case within many indigenous worldviews.

The idea of objects as living entities who need to be able to move and breathe was also discussed by the Rewolinski, who states she has found “any sort of figurative piece that resembles a human...that it should be able to rise up to face the Pueblo from which they came so that’s something that I’m going to have to figure out to do too” (Personal Interview, December 14, 2015). Rewolinski shows her understanding and acceptance of a worldview in which non-human and non-animal things can be alive and stored and treated as such by museum staff. This demonstrates staff acceptance of alternative worldviews to the point that the staff does something to put the objects within their appropriate ontological orientation.

### Recognizing Diversity

Diversity within and between tribes and organizations is an important theme in the staff discourse. Many staff members mentioned they did not want to “lump” or “stereotype” when discussing indigenous curatorial methods. Williams discussed this issue in the context of changes in handling, saying “So, we can’t just lump groups. And I think that’s part of it, like and that’s why we’ve worked so hard to have so many consultations and to work very closely so that we can nuance these things out” (Personal Interview, July 30, 2015). Williams’ statement indicates the “nuanced” nature of implementing indigenous curatorial methods. Throughout our interview, she mentioned nuance and diversity between tribes five more times. Williams also utilized simile when discussing this diversity, stating that the way I feel about a cross may be different from

the way she feels about a cross. The subject of nuancing object care and understanding differences was an important topic for Williams. The repetition of this subject by Williams indicates the importance of consultation, and is an indication of the critical mindset the staff possess. Bechhoefer also mentioned not wanting to stereotype different groups of people when discussing typical handling preferences across tribes, stating “typically, and I hate...I don’t ever want to stereotype or you know lump everyone together but most of the tribes I’ve worked with and talked to about things like that are understanding if you know something like that comes up” (Personal Interview, July 23, 2015). Both Bechhoefer and Williams mention the diversity that exists for object care between tribes. This language of diversity is an important aspect of the social language of indigenous curation that museum staff displayed during their interviews because it indicates that indigenous curation is not easy or uniform, and that it should be done through consultation.

Rewolinski also experienced intra-tribal differences. Referring to different societies within one group, she stated:

Excerpt 12:

DR: And so I was faced with in one consultation someone will be like “this object is not sacred, take it out of this room” but in another visit they’ll be like “this is so sacred, you can’t even handle it” so mainly, it’s different people, you get different people every visit and if they’re involved in different religious practices they might not be aware that it’s sacred. (Personal Interview, December 14, 2015).

This is a significant excerpt because it highlights the diversity that exists within tribes. As learned during field-work, tribal representatives and historic preservation officers change often over time.

### Recognizing the Colonial Past and Native Activism

Museum staff members also commonly cite Native activism and the colonial legacy of museums when discussing the implementation of indigenous curatorial methods. When asked why indigenous curation is starting to become a part of museum practice – why these changes are taking place beyond NAGPRA, Colwell replied, “I mean to me it’s very clear that these changes came about because Native peoples insisted that they happened” (Personal Interview, July 22, 2015). Colwell then went on to discuss how, in the 1970s, someone working for the DMNS took human remains off display after Native peoples asked her to. Colwell ended this discussion by saying “...anyway, so, the point is, she wouldn’t have taken the remains off display if Native Peoples didn’t demand it. And that is what began to create a shift in the museum culture (Personal Interview, July 22, 2015). This demonstrates Colwell’s recognition of the role of Native Activism in changing museum practices. He states it is “very clear” why these changes are taking place and reiterates that museum workers would not change their ways “if Native Peoples didn’t demand it”. To Colwell, there is no question that this would not have happened if people were not tirelessly insisting on their rights to their cultural heritage and to care for their ancestors.

Other staff members reiterated this view. When asked the same question, Tovar replied:



Excerpt 12:

IT: Because native people were finally heard. Um, I think they were yelling for a very, very long time. Still are yelling...my understanding of how things went down when...to get the National Museum of the American Indian Act passed in '89, what happened to have that happen was so intense. And I think it just made it so it was so...I don't want to say obvious. Because people...people really did have to fight for that. (Personal Interview, September 17, 2015)

The recognition of the role Native activism played in passing legislation such as NAGPRA to protect indigenous cultural heritage is paramount. Museum staff recognize that these changes did not take place in a vacuum, but that people fought for repatriation of their ancestors and for more sensitive care of their cultural heritage. This recognition by the Curator and NAGPRA officer fosters similar attitudes in other staff members, creating a staff culture and discourse that recognizes historical injustices and the work that has gone into museum decolonization.

As mentioned in Chapter 3 Native peoples were actively seeking repatriation and more sensitive collections care and management because bodies were often taken from the ground, and objects were often stolen or sold under duress. Museum staff also recognized the role of colonial collecting and its impact on indigenous populations.

Rewolinski, when asked about access restrictions for sacred objects, stated:

Excerpt 13:

DR: Well I think it's meant to sort of heal these historic wounds that we created by even like, I mean the very concept of museums is even...the idea of collecting

culture which sort of like objectifies and dehumanizes people and obviously we went around pillaging graves and taking things that weren't ours so I think it's just a really small thing that can be done to rectify that...it's not perfect. (Personal Interview, December 14, 2015)

Rewolinski argues that the DMNS is limiting access to these objects as a way to rectify past wrongs, and mentions the dehumanizing nature of museums. It seems that like Tovar in Excerpt 9, Rewolinski understands repatriation and the incorporation of indigenous curatorial methods through consultation is a way to humanize the museum. Williams expressed a similar thought when asked about access restrictions, stating:

Excerpt 14:

BW: I think a lot of it is that we're becoming more connected as a world. And I think people are finding their voices, and they're able to connect, and they're able to connect to more resources, and um, I think that overall as a society we're becoming more sensitive to other groups, and we're realizing it's not all one belief system and that the way things were treated in the past was not necessarily ok, and that there's ways to help rectify that and to work with groups and make things so that everybody benefits and feels respected. (Personal Interview, July 30, 2015)

As discussed in Chapter Three many see NAGPRA as human rights legislation, and as a means to impart restorative justice through a guided process with consequences for non-compliance. Museums may also be able to decolonize their collections care and management practices and take part in restorative justice by incorporating indigenous

curatorial methods through collaboration and participation. At the DMNS, when museum staff treat sacred, ceremonial, and religious items in a culturally sensitive manner they can become more than just shelves for stuff. It is evident that the DMNS, as Rewolinski stated, strive to "...be good stewards for [these objects] in the meantime" (Personal Interview, December 14, 2015) if they are not repatriated.

### Questioning Everything: Adapting and Learning

Another facet of staff discourse that seems to foster a respectful and decolonizing museum practice is the idea that incorporating indigenous curatorial methods into a museum requires patience, adaptation, and constant evaluation. In our interview, Rewolinski often stated that she is constantly evaluating what she does to ensure she is respectfully and appropriately caring for these items. As previously discussed, Rewolinski is currently working on a NAGPRA grant to further research and inventory sacred, ceremonial, and religious objects in the collection and to consult with tribes about how these objects should be cared for prior to repatriation if they will be repatriated, or if they are staying in the collection. When asked if she's had to reconcile conservation best practices or standard museum practices with indigenous curatorial practices Rewolinski said "[y]eah, I hate to say the same thing again...because it's like so much at the beginning of the process and especially for me personally, I feel like it's something I'm constantly considering" (Personal Interview, December 14, 2015). Rewolinski repeated this idea of process and learning later in her answer stating "...I think we're just going to have to figure it out as we go, you know. 'Cause yeah, every time I go into those files it's like 'you should touch it like this, put it here, do that', and you don't know until you go in

and see what they say. Or ask them now, again” (Personal Interview, December 14, 2015). Rewolinski, through the use of phrases such as “constantly considering” and “figure it out as we go” demonstrates the relatively new and adaptive approach of incorporating indigenous curatorial methods.

In order to do this work, it is evident that Rewolinski is constantly in a process of evaluation and negotiation. She also stated:

Excerpt 15:

Another thing I’m struggling with too is [sighs] especially with like, animal fetishes, like it can be commercial or a replica that was made to be sold, but that doesn’t mean that it’s not sacred, right? Because it is still a representation of a valid spirit, right? So right now I’m kind of just trying to hold off on trying to make judgments on what is sacred and what is not and just provide all the information I can and give it to the tribe. I’m not going to be here to be like “that’s sacred, no that’s not”, you know what I mean? (Personal Interview, December 14, 2015).

Rewolinski uses phrases such as “trying to hold off” and “I’m struggling with” in this excerpt, and does not claim to have all of the answers. It is evident that many of the questions would be determined by the appropriate tribal or organizational leaders. Along with learning and adapting her own practices, Rewolinski does not identify herself as an authority to make decisions about what is or is not sacred, and gives as much information as she can to each tribe so they make these decisions.

The discourse of constant evaluation is also evident in an excerpt from Williams, who discussed international repatriation that is not required by NAGPRA:

Excerpt 16:

BW: And then it gets sticky too because people were selling things that they shouldn't have been from other tribal members, and then profiting even though they shouldn't have been. But they're like 'oh we bought it from somebody from the tribe' but it's still not ok but it's like 'we're still hurting form this', so how do you...how do you balance everything?

JS: Right, yeah. Yeah. It's interesting.

BW: Well, I mean it gets into greater things too like returning things. Should things be returned to Egypt? And when is it ok to return things vs. not? You know, is it more ethical to keep them, and hold onto them? But do you hold onto them for perpetuity? Or until a certain point as things will be ethically held in the other country and who gets to decide that? (Personal Interview, July 30, 2015)

These excerpts from Williams and Rewolinski portray a critical mindset. They both ask questions about what is ethical, what is sacred, and do not claim to have the answers.

This critical mindset evident in the staff discourse seems to contribute to the acceptance of alternative museological practices.

#### Relationship Building and Connectivity

Some of the staff members at the DMNS discuss the benefits that coincide with consultation and indigenous curation. Meaningful relationships that provide additional knowledge about the collections in the museum are gained from the interactions between

indigenous peoples, material culture, and museum staff. It is important to note that indigenous peoples and museum staff are not mutually exclusive groups of people at the DMNS or at other museums, and the DMNS has programs and initiatives that employ indigenous peoples specifically. The importance of the relationships built through consultation was mentioned by both the former and current NAGPRA coordinators. Both Bechhoefer and Tovar discuss these relationships as mutually beneficial. Perhaps best capturing this sentiment, Bechhoefer stated:

Excerpt 17:

MB: ...have things been repatriated? Of course they have been. But have we also in a lot of instances created a wonderful working relationship with tribes and groups whereby we have gained, I would say, far more than the things? And I can't say we've lost them through repatriation because typically it's such a collaborative process...but the amount of information we gain from tribes and from other groups throughout the world coming in and telling us about the collections we have is pretty invaluable. (Personal Interview, July 23, 2015)

Tovar indicated a similar thought, stating "...like I said when people come in they know so much about these things and even if they don't you know it's the context of the meaning something has in a community as opposed to a, an art object. You can learn so much from these relationships". Bechhoefer elaborates on a few important ideas in this excerpt. First, collaboration as a result of repatriation and the efforts of tribes and organizations has created "wonderful working relationships with tribes and groups". Second, even though some may understand repatriation as a "loss" for museums, she

believes the museum is gaining “more than the things”, including information and relationships which are, in her words, “invaluable”. Through appropriate and ethical museum practice, the staff at the DMNS state the museum is benefitting from these relationships.

### **Staff Discourse: World Building**

Embedded within the staff discourse of indigenous curation is also a discourse which demonstrates how the worlds of Western museums and indigenous curation have come together to form a new type of ‘world’, or critical museological practice. The museum staff at the DMNS have developed an understanding of how and why indigenous curation and alternative museological practices in general are implemented within the DMNS. I present this world building as a discourse of critical museological practice within the DMNS which brings indigenous curation into Western collections care and management and is evident through staff discourse of how they understand the DMNS as going beyond what is expected within NAGPRA, being a leader within the museum world, and recognizing diversity.

#### **Beyond NAGPRA: International Repatriation and Indigenous Curation**

Through Native activism and an understanding of alternative ontologies, adapting and learning, and relationship building, a critical museological practice has emerged at the DMNS that recognizes the spirit of NAGPRA and goes beyond repatriation and indigenous curation within the United States. Implementing indigenous curatorial methods is not required under NAGPRA, and the examples of indigenous curation discussed above are all technically going beyond NAGPRA. The discussion of

indigenous curatorial methods implemented for international sacred, ceremonial, and religious items is utilized here to demonstrate that the DMNS goes beyond NAGPRA for more than items which would potentially qualify for repatriation under United States law. Williams demonstrated this international sensitivity when discussing Australian sacred objects:

Excerpt 18:

JS: Alright, and have there been any instances of avoidance of preservation, for these types of objects, and can you think of any examples of that?

BW: [long pause]. Once again it's not for a NAGPRA object but it's for a, um, aboriginal Australian object. So...we're trying to treat things sensitively across the world which is one of the things I really appreciate about DMNS. (Personal Interview, July 30, 2015)

In this excerpt, Williams states she is appreciative that the DMNS goes beyond NAGPRA and tries to be culturally appropriate towards sensitive objects across the world. Tovar also discusses this global sensitivity in the context of the Culturally Sensitive Storage Room:

Excerpt 19:

IT: When we planned to have that sensitive storage area in the new space, it was um, the intent was to hold not just Native American, it was to hold anything in our collection that we thought would be considered sensitive. And so we really wanted to apply it globally, you know. As a human thing. Not just a "we're doing



this because NAGPRA is in place”, but we’re doing this because we are trying to honor people. (Personal Interview, September 17, 2015)

Both Tovar and Williams discussed something similar to “the spirit of NAGPRA” which was discussed in Chapter Three, Excerpts 18 and 19 demonstrate how the language of going beyond NAGPRA has permeated the museum staff’s discourse to build a sensitive museological practice which attempts to “honor people” as well as NAGPRA.

Another facet of going beyond NAGPRA is international repatriation. Williams discussed repatriating Vigongo, which are sacred objects from Kenya. She states, “[w]e really are trying. And we’re trying internationally, like we’re trying to get the Vigongo back to Kenya” (Personal Interview, July 30, 2015). Williams later discussed the various issues accompanying international repatriation, but the statement that the DMNS is trying to be sensitive internationally echoes Tovar’s statement about honoring people as a whole through cultural sensitivity.

Rewolinski also discusses the DMNS going beyond NAGPRA, stating “It’s nice that DMNS is a museum that doesn’t do this stuff just because it’s law” (Personal Interview, December 14, 2015), referring to the Vigongo. As discussed previously in Chapter Four, within a classical museum paradigm, the goal would be to hold on to items and attempt to preserve them in perpetuity. Although there is no legislation requiring such actions internationally, the DMNS is trying to repatriate items internationally. This demonstrates a critical, decolonizing museological practice within the DMNS which encourages international sensitivity.

## Being a Leader in the Museum World

Staff discourse also situates the DMNS as an institution that is leading a “movement” of cultural sensitivity for objects from around the world, international repatriation, as well as NAGPRA compliance, using words such as “spear-head” and “forefront”. Williams, referring to the curator, Colwell, and the repatriation of Kenyan Vigongo states, “[t]here’s competing views and um, yeah. Chip has an interesting and good job. And I feel like all in all that this museum is at the forefront” (Personal Interview, July 30, 2015). Rewolinski echoes this, stating “It’s nice that DMNS is a museum that doesn’t do this stuff just because it’s law, like we did it before NAGPRA existed and we’re doing it because we want to spear-head that movement and we want to do the right thing” (Personal Interview, December 14, 2015). This language indicates an emergent museological practice at the DMNS which reconciles Western museology and indigenous curatorial methods, and also indicates that the DMNS may be actively trying to set a standard or example.

The importance of cultural sensitivity permeates the institution to such a point that a staff member stated the DMNS would operate as it does now even without the law in place. Phegley, when asked beyond NAGPRA, why these changes were taking place replied:

Excerpt 20:

JP: beyond NAGPRA, I think we discussed yesterday, the act is really important in getting museums to be responsible for these objects, but I think we have such a high standard here, I don’t think it would matter if the act was in place or not

‘cause I think we would still be doing what we’re doing now. (Personal Interview July 17, 2015)

Phegley’s language, in this excerpt, parallels the language of both Williams and Rewolinski. To the staff in the Anthropology Collections Department, the DMNS has high standards, is at the forefront, and is spear heading a movement. With this type of language, it is evident that the staff possess a certain idea about what is needed for an ethical collection. This discourse contributes to a museological practice that is innovative and steps outside what may be considered the norm.

#### Building Sensitivity with Museum Staff Through Leadership

Leadership from Collections Managers and Curators certainly contributes to this language of pride in innovation amongst the collections and research assistants. Upper level staff at the museum understand what staff members, volunteers, and interns need in order to be culturally sensitive. Tovar discusses the “spiel” she would give to incoming museum staff and volunteers:

Excerpt 21:

IT: And to be honest I also, anytime that I did, it was all part of my training routine for people who worked for me, whether they were staff or student, or volunteer...it was part of the spiel, as I called it, the discussion on really how to handle items that we were just very respectful. And, you know we weren’t going to be loud and rowdy, and music, and all that stuff that happens sometimes during projects. We just tried to make sure that if anybody was working in there that it

was a very uh controlled...yeah just respectful space we tried to protect that. And we did. (Personal Interview, September 17, 2015)

Tovar's discussion of this type of "training routine" which includes being respectful and understanding the CSSR as a controlled space indicates that training for cultural sensitivity within the anthropology department at the DMNS is a norm.

The standardization of cultural sensitivity, collaboration, and co-curation within the DMNS as an institution was also discussed by Bechhoefer, who states:

Excerpt 22:

MB: the ability to include source communities and their perspectives and what they want the world to know about themselves as opposed to us telling the world what we think they should know about the groups...I mean it's something that's come up not only in collections management but I've seen co-curation, you know and just being able to consult with groups and source communities in general...just the general ethics of, and again, some institutions may not agree with this but the general ethics of caring for collections for people who are either still around or their direct descendants are still here...I mean it's sort of mind boggling to think that you wouldn't work with them on projects and exhibits and educational programming and everything else. So, to me, it's just sort of a standard way...of course with collections care and management that you would do that as well. (Personal Interview, July 23, 2015)

Bechhoefer's remarks further indicate the standardization of fostering cultural sensitivity at the DMNS through the consultation and collaboration that leads to the incorporation of

indigenous curatorial methods. This excerpt is also interesting because Bechhoefer highlights the importance for inclusion of co-curation and consultation not just in programming and exhibitions, but also in collections care and management. Through the leadership from collections managers, museum staff, volunteers, and interns develop an understanding of sensitivity which is evident in previous excerpts from collections assistants. During interviews, the concept of indigenous curation was not foreign to the collections and research assistants, and this cannot only be attributed to many of these assistants having backgrounds in anthropology or other social sciences, as Phegley, who demonstrated this knowledge in Excerpt 20, has a background in fine-arts.

### **Conclusion**

The data presented in this chapter demonstrates not only that the DMNS is incorporating indigenous curatorial methods, but also that the staff at the DMNS are aware of the colonial past, the contributions of indigenous peoples to the museum, and recognize this is not a perfect process. Through the social languages of both indigenous curation and Western museums as institutions, it is evident that a critical, decolonizing museum practice that incorporates indigenous curation is emerging at the DMNS. The term 'emerging' signifies staff members' acknowledgement of the self-evaluative nature of this process. Ideas of cultural sensitivity, going beyond NAGPRA, and the importance of inclusion are deeply embedded within staff discourse, yet the process of incorporating indigenous curation has not been perfected and perhaps never will be.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION**

### **Scope of the Project**

The goal of this project was to understand how and why museum professionals incorporate indigenous curation for American Indian sacred, religious, and ceremonial objects in a mainstream museum. This project was undertaken from the perspective of a museum academic and professional studying museum academics and professionals at one institution, and is limited in scope because of this.

I also set out to understand how and why indigenous curation was being incorporated as the “ethical” or “right” thing to do in a museum, as understood through literature on the history of collecting American Indian objects and individuals, indigenous curation, legislation regarding repatriation, ethics, and critical and postcolonial museum theory. I formulated three research goals to explore these questions:

- 1) Identify examples of indigenous curation being used at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science.
- 2) Discuss how and why indigenous curation is a form of ethical and culturally appropriate practice within the Denver Museum of Nature and Science.
- 3) Discuss how and why museum professionals at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science reconcile the use of “best practices” and secular, mainstream collections care and management with indigenous curation of American Indian religious, sacred, and ceremonial objects.

The research questions were formed utilizing frameworks from critical museum theory, postcolonial or decolonizing museum theory, and the new museology. To explore these questions, I utilized semi-structured interviewing and participant observation.

### **Summary of the Findings**

By looking for examples of indigenous curation, and applying the concepts of social language (Gee 2014, 67) and world building (Gee 2011, 85) to the transcribed interview data the following was found:

- 1) The Anthropology staff at the DMNS incorporate indigenous curatorial methods via consultation into their collections care and management.
- 2) The anthropology staff at the Denver Museum of Nature and science use particular languages when they discuss their ideas about “Western Museums”, relaying ideas about open access to knowledge, treating every object the same, and typological organization of the collections. They also use particular languages when discussing “Indigenous Curation” and discuss topics such as culturally appropriate storage materials, and accepting alternative world-views, and these social languages demonstrate the staffs’ willingness to understand alternative ontologies and incorporate them into their collections care and management programs.
- 3) Museum staff at the DMNS place importance on recognizing the nuances and differences between tribes when it comes to object care and implementing indigenous curatorial methods.

- 4) The museum staff recognize the colonial past as a reason to incorporate indigenous curatorial methods as a form of restorative justice, and recognize the importance of Native activism in restorative justice. This can be understood as a way to decolonize the museum.
- 5) The museum staff understand incorporating indigenous curatorial methods as a constantly evolving process, and they adapt their museum practices because of this.
- 6) The relationships and connections built through consultation are beneficial to the museum staff, and are understood as invaluable.
- 7) The museum staff at the DMNS have developed an understanding of how and why indigenous curation and alternative museological practices in general are implemented within the DMNS. This is evident as a built world and discourse of museological practice within the DMNS which brings indigenous curation into Western collections care and management and is communicated through staff discourse of how they understand the DMNS as going beyond what is expected within NAGPRA, being a leader within the museum world, and recognizing diversity.

### **Significance and Recommendations**

The purpose of this project was to present a case study of how one large, mainstream institution incorporates culturally sensitive storage into their collections care and management practices. Through the presentation of data acquired, I provided examples of requested curation methods by tribes which were incorporated into the



collections care and management practices, demonstrated through staff discourse how the staff members incorporate these care methods into their already existing care methods, and presented information on why the staff at the DMNS think it is both important and appropriate to incorporate alternative world-views and care methods into a museum entrenched in Western thinking.

This thesis can provide information to mainstream museums, small and large, who are thinking about incorporating indigenous curation into their collections care and management, want to know how it can be done, and wish to understand why museum professionals and academics at the DMNS think it should be done. Additionally, this thesis engages museum professionals and academics from the perspective of a museum professional and academic, and seeks to contribute to critical inquiry in Anthropology and Museum and Heritage Studies. However, it is important to recognize the limited nature of this project, as interviews with neither tribal members who have worked with the DMNS nor indigenous museum professionals were included in the data analysis.

Much of the discussion throughout this thesis has centered on incorporating alternative ontologies and epistemologies, or alternative world views, ways of knowing, and ways of being into museums. In the literature review, this was discussed in the context of indigenous curation as an alternative way of being with and knowing objects, and how bringing alternative ontologies and epistemologies into mainstream museums can aid in the revitalization and reclamation of indigenous cultural heritage. Breaking down Western frameworks of knowing the world through indigenous curation can make museums more approachable and equitable to people who may understand the world

from alternative ontologies. Theory, ontology and epistemology were discussed in the context of object agency, social lives and cultural biography of objects, and decolonizing the museum. This discussion is important in order to understand how incorporating alternative ontologies into mainstream museums aids in decolonization of museums because recognizing alternative ontologies necessitates co-curation, collaboration, and consultation. Finally, in the analysis, ontology was presented through interview data with DMNS staff members who discussed objects as living beings and openly and constantly questioned their own beliefs and practices. Museum staff at the DMNS questioned their own epistemological and ontological frameworks and those of the museum. As anthropologists we are constantly told to be culturally relativistic. This project delves into the core of relativism and critical examination, and asks those taking care of cultural heritage to acknowledge the ontological framework they are living and working within. Museum professionals can recognize and respect the diversity of ways of being in the world and knowing it in order to create a more culturally sensitive, equitable museum practice which recognizes tangible and intangible cultural heritage as living parts of culture which sometimes do not need to be contained and unmoved in a sterile environment or preserved in perpetuity to mean something to future generations.

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