

MuseumsForward

Indigenous perspectives on repatriation: Reflections from tribal members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

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Abstract

Indigenous repatriation is a complex and challenging discourse, involving perspectives from heritage institutions, museum professionals, and indigenous people who are invested in the outcomes of repatriation processes. Despite the enactment of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990, thousands of indigenous ancestors and belongings remain held in institutional repositories, yet to be repatriated. With the onset of increasingly visible movements for decolonization, indigenous perspectives are essential for guiding the process of effective and empathetic repatriation. The purpose of this study was to examine indigenous perspectives about repatriation processes to reflect on potential themes aligned with decolonization methodologies. A case study design was used, focused on the Chachalu Museum and Cultural Center, Grande Ronde, OR, involving interviews with staff who identify as members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. The results of this study highlight the effects of settler colonialism on indigenous identity and repatriation, prioritizing an indigenous perspective about navigating institutional repatriation, community healing, and indigenous sovereignties. Implications of this study include repatriation reflections and strategies for indigenous peoples and museum professionals, guiding a further discussion for decolonization methodologies in repatriation work.

Keywords

Indigenous sovereignty; repatriation; decolonization; Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

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Introduction

On September 29, 2021, the Association on American Indian Affairs (AAIA) submitted an open letter to the Department of the Interior, calling for substantive changes to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Enacted in 1990, NAGPRA requires museums to repatriate cultural items by the descendants of a deceased Indian individual, Indian tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations. However, 30 years later, it is widely criticized for still perpetuating the colonial practices it was designed to disrupt. The AAIA writes in their letter, “We believe that the current regulations have failed Native Nations, Native Hawaiian Organizations, as well as agencies and museums, by creating loopholes that cement the institutional racism of our shared past” (Association on American Indian Affairs, 2021).

Despite the limitations of NAGPRA, indigenous peoples have built capacity within their communities to pursue repatriation through other methods that honor their sovereignties. Integral to indigenous repatriation is the assessment and subversion of settler colonial structures, including racialized constructions of indigenous identity and legal barriers that violate indigenous sovereignty. Through applying decolonization praxis to repatriation processes, tribes and institutions can pursue repatriation outside of NAGPRA’s inefficacies. To exemplify the need for indigenous repatriation outside of NAGPRA, this article describes a research study that examined indigenous perspectives about repatriation at the Chachalu Museum and Cultural Center (Chachalu), in Grand Ronde, Oregon.

History of Indigenous Collections

The cultural, historic, and scientific institutions that arose during the settlement of the United States established their foundational collections through the looting and exploitation of Indigenous ancestral remains and belongings. Spurred by the constructed phenomenon of the “vanishing Indian,” settlers who considered themselves researchers and collectors of “authentic” Native cultures zealously pursued potential archaeological sites (Lonetree, 2012). Collectors sought acquisitions by any means necessary, often through desecration of graves, sacred sites, and dwellings of Indigenous peoples (Chari, 2013).

While many ancestors and objects formed private collections, many collectors also donated their findings to heritage and science institutions for research and preservation (Lonetree, 2012).

The subsequent development of anthropology disciplines in the United States, including archaeology and physical anthropology, relied on the mass collections of Native material culture and ancestors held in institutional repositories (Kakaliouras, 2017). The settler entitlement to Native peoples was further endorsed by the federal government with legislation such as the Antiquities Act of 1906 (Bruchac, 2010). Under this law, indigenous remains were deemed “federal property” and protected for research as “archaeological resources” (Chari, 2013, p. 23). Thus, the implication of colonizer control extended to not only land, but ancestors as well (Kakaliouras, 2017). Consequently, researchers studied Native remains and shared their misconceptions with institutions holding indigenous collections. Instead of engaging with Native peoples themselves, museum audiences relied on these false narratives and “what they guessed (or wished) to be true” (Bruchac, 2010, p. 137). The assumed stewardship and interpretation of indigenous collections by institutions sought to subvert indigenous sovereignties and construct new racialized Indian identities that can be controlled and defined under colonial power.

Undoubtedly, the overall process of building these foundational institutions has relied on “dehumanizing” indigenous peoples and using their ancestors for the “production of scientific knowledge” (Bruchac, 2010, p. 146). These foundations for indigenous collections are still evident in museums, particularly in their lacking efforts to repatriate ancestors and belongings in an effective, timely manner.

Implementation of NAGPRA

After sustained indigenous movements for repatriation in the 1960s, U.S Congress passed NAGPRA in 1990 (Colwell, 2017). With this new legal avenue for indigenous repatriation, NAGPRA “directed all museums and institutions receiving federal funding to compile summaries and inventories of their Native American collections” (Bruchac, 2010, p. 138). The enactment of NAGPRA boasted accountability and justice for Native peoples, but repatriation remained a laborious and timely process. Additionally, many institutions and archaeologists feared the loss of their livelihood and access to prized Indigenous collections (Colwell, 2017).

Many shortcomings of NAGPRA were discovered, with challenges evolving throughout the collaborative process involved with each repatriation case. The indigenous collections held in institutions have been integrated into repositories for decades, some for nearly a century, and many collections had been accessioned with limited context for provenience and provenance. Unsurprisingly, valuable context was lost during the circulation of indigenous belongings and ancestors between institutions and private collectors (Bruchac, 2010).

The language regarding cultural affiliation under NAGPRA has also been criticized for its reliance on colonial designations of federal recognition. NAGPRA identifies various avenues for determining cultural affiliation, including geography, biology, oral histories, and more (Martinez et al., 2014). However, cultural affiliation is a complicated concept that cannot be neatly categorized; since Native peoples have existed since time immemorial, ancestral connections to oral history and kinship relations surpass the designations of constructed Indian identities. Yet, Native peoples are demanded to “exist convincingly in the past and in the present” and “present a cohesive modern identity” in order to have their repatriation requests acknowledged and perhaps fulfilled (Kakaliouras, 2017, p. 186). Moreover, cultural affiliation becomes increasingly difficult to determine when context is missing. NAGPRA attempts to match materials with Native peoples as accurately as possible, but without clear provenience, NAGPRA cannot promise such accuracy.

Additionally, the status of federal recognition continues to uphold barriers for Native peoples who are not federally recognized. Even with many institutions honoring repatriation claims from non-federally recognized tribes, proving cultural affiliation can be a laborious and expensive process that exceeds the capacity of their community's resources (Martinez et al., 2014).

Decolonization Methods for Repatriation

For many years, decolonization efforts have been led by indigenous peoples to address the weaknesses of NAGPRA and repatriation processes. In 2005, James Riding In emphasized the need to decolonize NAGPRA due to the institutional manipulation of cultural affiliation, essentially setting a precedent for “culturally unidentifiable” claims that allow indigenous collections to remain stalled in institutions (Riding In, 2005). Moreover, Riding In connected this issue to settler entitlement to indigenous belongings, ancestors, and knowledge through the colonial systems of governance. To decolonize NAGPRA, Riding In (2005)

identified several actions to decolonize repatriation and demand accountability from institutions. Twenty-five years later, the process of “decolonizing NAGPRA” has been demonstrated in some repatriation cases, although the call for urgent reform continues.

The implications of assigning indigenous identity perpetuate the racialization of Native peoples, particularly within the context of descendancy. Being able to claim descendancy has been privileged as the only certain pathway to rights or benefits for Native peoples, including recognition under NAGPRA (Kakaliouras, 2017). Federal recognition complicates the identities of Native descendants, especially since NAGPRA utilizes binaries of “unidentifiable” and “culturally affiliated” that do not encompass culturally dense Native identities (Bruchac, 2010, p. 147). Instead of viewing Native peoples as sovereign nations, institutions rely on defining Native peoples through their relationship to federal entities. Collaborations between institutions and Native peoples are consequently skewed due to the power of collection managers to determine valid cultural affiliation (Kakaliouras, 2017). Indigenous activists have identified this pattern of subverting indigenous sovereignties and identities as a crucial reason for implementing decolonization methodologies.

Indigenous people continue to lead the discussion on “decolonizing” NAGPRA and repatriation. The Association on American Indian Affairs (AAIA), which hosts an Annual Repatriation Conference, describes their repatriation philosophy as an “intentional movement towards reconciliation, reparation, return – healing and making whole” (Association of American Indian Affairs, 2021b). Recently, the AAIA identified how NAGPRA language can be improved, including the concept of “right of possession,” which institutions can claim to remove their obligation to repatriation. AAIA (2021a) argues that “there is no right of possession without consent of the affiliated Tribe or NHO at the time any such objects were separated from their original home” (p. 2). As exemplified in AAIA’s critiques, the power of indigenous community organizing to dismantle settler possession is one of many forms of decolonization praxis.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine indigenous perspectives about repatriation processes to identify themes aligned with decolonization methodologies and repatriating outside of NAGPRA. The study was guided by 3 key research questions:

1. How do indigenous people define and enact repatriation processes?
2. How can repatriation processes better prioritize healing for indigenous communities?
3. What do indigenous people want museum professionals and other tribal nations to consider for their repatriation work?

Methods

This research utilized a case study design from a single data site. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with staff from the Chachalu Museum and Cultural Center located in Grand Ronde, Oregon. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde are a community of over 30 tribes and bands that traditionally spanned across western Oregon, southwest Washington, and northern California. The tribes were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands in 1856 and onto the designated reservation in western Oregon where the CTGR reside today. Although the CTGR reservation thrives today, the Tribe had to work diligently to build their community resources after they were terminated in 1954 (Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, n.d.).

While the complex discussion of termination and its impacts are outside the scope of this study, it is vital to recognize the positionality of CTGR as a terminated Tribe. CTGR community members collaborated to restore the Tribe's Federal Recognition in 1983, resulting in the Grand Ronde Restoration Act (Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, n.d.). The repeated redefining of CTGR identity through the federal government lens of recognition has undoubtedly had inter-generational impacts on the community, which interview participants affirmed in their responses. Through their restoration, CTGR gained the capacity to build their community identity and institutions, including Chachalu.

The Chachalu Museum is the only museum and cultural center that is dedicated to representing the shared history and cultures of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. (Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, n.d.). While Chachalu does include "museum" in its title, the space was designed as a cultural center "curated specifically for tribal members to have a space to learn about their heritage in a safe and welcoming environment" (Hale, 2022). Thus, Chachalu prioritizes the CTGR community and welcomes tribal members to use their space to learn, connect, and build community as a restored Tribe (Hale, 2022).

Sampling

A single case study was used instead of multiple sites to honor the process of working with indigenous museums and communities, which requires time to build relationships and trust. Chachalu was selected due to its integral role as an educational gathering space for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde community and my existing relationships with tribal members.

I worked previously with the Tribe and the UW Field Methods in Indigenous Archaeology (FMIA) Field School to conduct excavation and student training in indigenous archaeology. The experience allowed me to cultivate relationships with tribal members, and it is paramount that those relationships continue to be honored and cared for long-term. Although there were established relationships, further trust building was prioritized during the study by attending CTGR cultural and powwow gatherings, sharing space in the Chachalu research library, and bringing a gift of gratitude for Chachalu staff.

To be mindful of the community's wellbeing, the timeline for data collection was prolonged to not be extractive of tribal members' time or labor. I visited Chachalu for a week of residency during the summer. Tribal member staff were approached directly to ask for their participation in interviews. Additional resources from Chachalu's research library were utilized to examine the Tribe's experience with repatriation cases (See Appendix B-C).

Data Collection

In-person, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four Chachalu staff members: Chris Bailey (Cultural Preservation Specialist; Chinook, Rogue River), Travis Stewart (Manager; Chinook, Rogue River, Kalapuya), Nicolas Atanacio (Historic Preservation Technician; Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde), and Tammy Cook (Education Committee Chair, Elder Committee Vice Chair; Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde). Each person opted to respond as tribal members, rather than as primarily cultural heritage employees. This distinction is meaningful because indigenous people must strategically navigate cultural heritage spaces to be accepted and respected in a professional capacity. Instead, each CTGR tribal member spoke from their perspectives as indigenous people navigating a system that has repeatedly harmed their community, and as indigenous people who have personal investment in repatriation for their community.

Each interview lasted 20 to 50 minutes, and the audio was recorded with the participant's consent. Interview questions were designed to welcome tribal member's perspectives on concepts of repatriation, decolonization, and sovereignty (see Appendix A). The Chachalu research library was also utilized with permission to scan documents, including legal correspondences and reflections from tribal members.

Data Analysis

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then analyzed for themes related to the individual's own indigenous perspective. Interview themes were then compared across individual responses to identify overlapping concepts and experiences, while also honoring the distinctions between each tribal member's perspective. The narrowed list of themes was categorized under broad subjects for data analysis, and scanned resources from the research library were analyzed for information relevant to each data category.

Results

To contextualize the responses from CTGR tribal members, two major repatriation cases involving the Tribe must be recognized: the Summers Collection and Tomanowos. Both cases gained public interest due to the complex legal and ethical arguments that arose in response. In the 1870s, Rev. Robert W. Summers collected belongings of the CTGR "under the assumption that the peoples living at Grand Ronde would soon be extinct" (Parks, 2019). Known as the Summers Collection, it eventually was donated to the British Museum in 1900 and kept in off-site storage. Once the Tribe regained their federal recognition, they prioritized building Chachalu in hopes of bringing the Summers Collection, and many other collections, back home. After long-term negotiations with the British Museum, the CTGR were able to secure a one-year loan of sixteen objects to be displayed at Chachalu. CTGR tribal members utilized various methods to gain as much ancestral knowledge as possible before the loan ended (Parks, 2019).

Tomanowos, also named the Willamette Meteorite, is a Sky Person who landed on a glacier in Canada before traveling to Western Oregon. Since time immemorial, Clackamas Chinooks have honored Tomanowos in their lives as a spiritual being. With the arrival of white settlers, Tomanowos was noticed for its extraordinary appearance and subsequently taken from its homelands by settlers. Tomanowos has traveled across the country for entertainment and scientific research, eventually being acquired by the American Museum of Natural History.

In 1999, the Tribe claimed Tomanowos under NAGPRA as a sacred object, but AMNH countersued the case. Currently, an agreement between AMNH and CTGR established a tribal youth internship program, and tribal members can visit Tomanowos privately for ceremony one day each year (Frost, 2019).

Both of these cases will be referenced throughout the results that follow. These results are organized according to themes within the three research questions that guided this study.

How do indigenous people define and enact repatriation processes?

Repatriation is flexible in its enactment, whether through the perspectives of institutions or indigenous peoples. During interviews, CTGR tribal members shared their interpretations of repatriation in theory and practice, which included several prominent themes: a) defining repatriation, b) honoring the life of objects, c) the construct of Indian identity, and d) enacting repatriation.

a) Defining repatriation

Responses showed variation in definitions of repatriation, ranging from repatriation in a “basic sense” to more spiritual and cultural implications. A recurring point integral to defining the goals of repatriation was the necessity to bring ancestors home. Atanacio defined repatriation as ancestors coming home, and not a “catch-all positive federal law that helps us get things of ours back.” Similarly, Bailey emphasized the need for ancestors to return, because “if it’s our people, they should be home.” From a cultural perspective, Cook identified repatriation as a spiritual process, which the CTGR community “holds really tight.”

b) Honoring the life of objects

Taking care of ancestors and belongings through traditional community practices can be challenging to navigate with institutions that do not share or understand indigenous perspectives. These practices honor the intangible aspects of the repatriation process, which was another core theme that was shared by each tribal member. Stewart described how institutional barriers interfere with community care for belongings:

“Why can't they touch things? Why? Why do we teach that you can't touch things that are meant to be touched?... It's a mortar--it's meant for grinding things up. If it's not grinding things up, it's not a mortar and it's not important.”

In Stewart's example, the inability to touch and connect with belongings has multiple impacts of inaccessibility, one being the denial of the cultural relationship that communities have with objects. Atanacio emphasized:

“The value has nothing to do with how I look [at belongings] or what I can show to people. The value has to do with holding on to something that was once taken away from my people.”

Besides cultural inaccessibility, participant's responses also described the inherent life of objects. In particular, objects were made for a purpose and need to be used for what they were intended, or as Bailey described it: belongings should be where they “do the most good.” Similarly, Stewart framed museum gallery displays in a funerary context, where belongings are not honored or connected with their communities, stating: “It's like killing something. Something that's alive and then putting it behind glass.”

c) Construct of Indian identity

The assignment of cultural affiliation and indigenous identity was also mentioned prominently during interviews. Entangled with repatriation processes is the colonial construct of a racialized and politicized Indian identity. Tribal members stressed the necessity of deconstructing the monolithic Indian identity and honoring the density of Native perspectives. Bailey emphasized how institutions need to work directly with communities and “not create blanket policies.” Moreover, Stewart related personally with the racialization of Indian identity:

“I mean, like, am I Indian? I'm a Chinook person...Or am I just Indian, which is like all these different things, you know? Like, is it my connection to place or is it connection to some kind of manufactured ethnic group?”

Stewart's mention of "connection to place" was a shared value amongst tribal members, from both within and outside a repatriation context. Similarly, Atanacio reflected on his identity as a member of a terminated and restored Tribe:

"One day they said 'You're not Indian.' And to this day, I still can't understand why my people as a group are the only people that have to carry a card around and prove we are who we are."

Termination, cultural affiliation, and racialization were entwined throughout tribal members' responses, demonstrating nuanced relationships to the concepts of indigenous identity.

d) Enacting repatriation processes

When speaking of the challenges of fulfilling repatriation, institutional barriers were a repeated discussion. Tribal members cited the performativity, gatekeeping, and unfulfilling compromises that they as individuals and as a Tribe have experienced from cultural heritage institutions. Atanacio described the harm of institutional performativity, especially regarding institutions that are widely perceived as leaders in the "decolonizing museums" movement:

"I think we are removed completely in most ways, and when we are included, it's coming from a place of building an image. Building the illusion that they are willing to fulfill those needs. They're willing to work with us but not accept us."

Several responses from tribal members elaborated on this concept of performativity. Stewart described his experience of working with institutions that are willing to "compromise," yet maintain control to facilitate the institutions' ability to gatekeep. Stewart stressed that "the idea is the Tribes should be controlling their own collections and narratives, and there shouldn't be this gatekeeper, which I think there is always the urge to be." A frequent example that was mentioned was the CTGR's experience with Summers Collection loan, which included international bureaucracy the Tribe had to navigate. Stewart described some of his experiences while trying to secure the loan:

"A year prior to our loan, I went over to visit the collection and even that was a lot of navigating of bureaucracy, just to get over there to visit...For a certain

amount of time, we thought we would have to hire a security guard to work here for the duration for an entire year to guard the objects, and then found a couple work workarounds so we didn't have to do that, like adding cameras to the display cases.”

Reconnecting with the ancestral objects for a short period has been viewed by many, including some tribal members, as a success for the Tribe to experience repatriation of some traditional knowledge. However, some responses indicated that returning the Summers Collection and following the strict protocols from the British Museum was not a fulfilling repatriation. Cook elaborated on the harm of compromises in general:

“Sometimes it's an outsider that comes in to say, 'Here's what we have. Would you like them back?' But there's kind of a catch. You can have them back and take a picture of it, but you're never really going to get it back.”

Tribal members further described the resulting distrustful relationship between indigenous peoples and museums. When asked whether the Tribe has experienced any fulfilling repatriations, as defined by each individual tribal member, there were a range of responses from “not at all” to examples including the Summers Collection and Tomanowos. In regard to fulfilling repatriations, Atanacio answered:

“I would love to say yes. I would love to have an answer that was yes. However, I feel like even the little victories we've had aren't quite victories, and more so products of guilt and/or criticism. And it's all tied to what I feel is elitism among institutions. It's not truly about the people. It's not truly about the place. It's more about how it looks to the world.”

As for the possessiveness of institutions, Bailey described the “reluctance” of institutions and the recurring argument of holding ancestors and belongings for Western science, which upholds “the colonial attitudes that remove those items.” Other tribal members described the phenomenon of non-Native people appropriating indigenous cultures for their own gratification. Atanacio described this observation as “holding on and losing your own culture and grasping desperately to hold on to something that feels like culture.” Despite their frustrations, tribal members also provided some understanding for the individuals embodying those behaviors. Atanacio described his

feelings of pity for “the other side” (non-indigenous people) because he can’t imagine not knowing his cultural identity.

The topic of emotional, physical, and financial labor on the Tribe during repatriation processes was also discussed in-depth. One example discussed was the assessment of tribal collection policies and storage, which the Tribe has had multiple experiences with during repatriation processes. Stewart referenced the British Museum and the difficulties of housing the Summers Collection at Chachalu, and the laborious process to meet the British Museum’s specifications for the loan:

“I had to pick out each thing I wanted to see instead of just going in to look at the metal shelves that they're stored on. Coming back [to Chachalu], I was trying to curate an exhibit on it and seeing the requirements they were asking of us just to display these items after seeing how they were stored...”

The details of fulfilling the British Museum’s requirements were described by Stewart as undue labor on the Tribe, and a clear message, whether intentional or not, that the Tribe was not qualified to care for their own belongings. This dynamic of having to prove the abilities of the Tribe and their cultural center was emphasized by Atanacio: “I had to learn twice as much and work twice as hard. I have to talk twice as good. I have to be twice as nice and do everything I can to not be a threat.”

Tribal members also addressed the movement for institutions to employ more indigenous people for their collection care and repatriation efforts, and the responses indicated that hiring more Native people does not always make the institution more effective or safe for indigenous communities. In fact, tribal members expressed concerns over indigenous employees being tokenized and burdened with undue labor, as Atanacio described:

“It kind of comes off as a bit token. But also to me what it looks like, and how it plays out, is taking an indigenous person- who in a lot of ways would probably do things differently if it was up to them-and creating an advocate for yourself and your institution versus advocating for the object or the culture of the community that these things are coming from.”

Besides concerns of tokenizing Native staff in institutions, tribal members also mentioned the burden of labor from the perspective of the tribal organization or cultural center. Cook reflected on the early

days of NAGPRA, when the Tribe was flooded with inventories and letters from institutions:

“We had tons of museums sending us letters and there was really nobody. The Tribes didn't really have that kind of arm, you know, as far as that goes. So, I kind of had to fill that role and it was mostly filing. But then when we really dug into it, we were like, ‘Oh my gosh, here's this huge need.’”

How can repatriation processes better prioritize healing for indigenous communities?

Paramount to the discussion of repatriation is self-reflection on the emotional and spiritual impacts for indigenous peoples. CTGR tribal members' responses reflected on a) trauma and spirituality, and b) healing in the repatriation process.

a) Reflections on trauma and spirituality

Tribal members shared their personal perspectives on how repatriation can be traumatic for indigenous people and the complexity of “walking in two worlds” as tribal members and cultural preservation employees. Stewart emphasized throughout his responses about the importance of relationship-building with institutions, and he framed his perspective through the navigation of indigenous trauma:

“You're kind of saying that the traumas that happened to us, that have caused us to lose certain things, is somehow less relevant to other societies. They're just so far away from it that there's no way of recapturing it. Well, you can, I mean, people understand when they spend time with you, they start to understand you.”

Stewart's comment also connects with the theme of distrust between tribes and institutions, which has facilitated further trauma to indigenous communities who find institutions to be inaccessible for repatriation. The emotional impacts of colonial trauma have caused generational harm to Native peoples, as Atanacio expressed: “It was very much taught to me that part of being indigenous is having to walk in two worlds. Because one world allows me to have my living culture, but the other world doesn't see it.” Cook also highlighted the emotional impacts of having materials repatriated to the Tribe, saying that it was

“eye-opening” to see what objects came back to the Tribe that they did not even realize were taken during the Tribe’s forced removal to the reservation.

Being faced with the reality of learning how many ancestors, belongings, and sacred places have been stolen and harmed was another emotional discussion by tribal members. While the work of institutions to repatriate was acknowledged, the emotional connection with the work is significant to tribal members and not always understood by institutions. In his reflections, Atanacio admitted, “Some days I just feel like crying. Because it's hard to know what's happening to the places that are sacred to me and to the objects and the ancestry that are sacred to my people as well.”

The intergenerational impacts of repatriation were addressed by tribal members as well, especially regarding elders who lived through the mass looting and traumatic assimilation practices that have contributed to many institutional collections. Cook mentioned the effect repatriation can have on CTGR elders:

“I just think that is a big word [repatriation], and sometimes that's scary. And then people sometimes are not going to move on from that. They're going to always remember the hurt of losing those things or termination. So, I think that sometimes they kinda combat themselves.”

The trauma of loss is a shared reality for CTGR tribal members, and indigenous people in general. Despite this, tribal members emphasized how culture is inherent to their identity as CTGR people, and how that aspect is not something that can be wholly explained or understood by colonial institutions, as Atanacio described:

“From an academic point of view, a lot of time our cultures are looked at as dead. But culture is something I've lived and breathed since I was a baby. And to not be able to identify with that feeling, I think it severely stunts people's ability to give context to a full situation.”

b) Reflections on healing

Tribal members also stressed the healing opportunities of repatriation that encourages them to continue advocating for their Tribe. Bailey described how institutional accountability is essential for community healing, including reflective practice that is not “just doing a land

acknowledgment before an event.” Bailey also emphasized the necessity of institutions being proactive, taking on labor, and allowing tribes to lead the collaborative process.

From a different healing perspective, Cook focused on the opportunity for tribes to create their own cultural centers and methods of care, similar to Chachalu. She encouraged reimagining the purpose of tribal “museum” or cultural center to best serve the community. Considering CTGR is a terminated tribe, Cook observed that repatriation has brought the community together to learn from the belongings that have come home after generational separation. She described her perspective of repatriation at Chachalu as an educational and healing experience for tribal members:

“I'm hoping that getting more involved with the community and letting some of the big tribal families know we can make copies, that we can do this, this, and this [and] we can preserve and bring some of these things for the future exhibit...I think it's positive and I think that building that trust is important.”

What do indigenous people want museum professionals and other tribal nations to understand for their repatriation work?

CTGR tribal members discussed methods, concepts, and futures they would like to see for their Tribe, and indigenous peoples in general. Their responses emphasized vital perspectives to a) honor indigenous sovereignties and b) decolonization methodologies for museums and individuals.

a) Honoring indigenous sovereignty

Indigenous sovereignty, or sovereignties, is a complex conceptualization and enactment of indigenous self-governance. Defining indigenous sovereignties is personal and individualized across indigenous peoples, and CTGR tribal members contextualized their understanding of sovereignty through their relationship with colonial museums. A repeated theme among responses was the question of “who can tell our stories?” or essentially, “who can make decisions for us?” The answer always came back to the Tribe, demonstrating one of the many ways to honor indigenous sovereignties. To this point, Bailey elaborated on the necessity for tribal autonomy in repatriation processes, as well as institutional investment in labor:

“Be willing to have some solutions when you come to work with the tribe, don't just expect the tribes to be able to solve all your problems while they're trying to get everything back. Come up with some stuff that you can work for, and also know that tribes have their own beliefs set in place that may be contrary to what yours are for those materials. And you need to be willing to give a little.”

Stewart also related the importance of honoring indigenous sovereignty in collection care and interpretation, and he pointed out that relationship-building is vital for subverting the colonial histories that institutions uphold about the Tribe. Stewart also noted how this process could be likened to “infiltration,” namely because indigenous people usually have to appeal to institutions in a non-combative way to not work “within” the system, but to “change” the system. Stewart highlighted positive outcomes of these relationships, particularly in advising institutions about how to care for the Tribe’s belongings and repatriating outside of NAGPRA. By building trust and allowing institutions to feel connected with the Tribe, Stewart reflected that repatriating outside of NAGPRA is easier for the Tribe and encourages institutions to initiate repatriation “because it’s right and it feels good.”

In response to a question about what museum professionals should understand about repatriation, Atanacio said, “I guess I would answer that with a question of why would you fight me? Why would you fight me on it if I truly care and love and feel real connection?”

b) Decolonization and repatriation

The topic of decolonization is entwined with indigenous sovereignties, and tribal members elaborated on decolonization methods that both indigenous peoples and colonial institutions can utilize. Similar to the plural understanding of “sovereignties,” tribal members emphasized that defining decolonization is not universal across indigenous peoples. Bailey summarized the plurality of decolonization as “what decolonization will look like is an understanding that all tribes are different.” Atanacio expanded on the concept of decolonization being individual and personal to each indigenous person:

“I happen to believe in learning the process better than those who created the process and being able to fight that way...But I think maybe my view of what decolonization can look like is kind of like everything I'm

asking for, right? It's being taken seriously. It's being allowed not just a seat at the table, but a real significant vote at the table.”

Atanacio’s point about being respected was echoed by each tribal member and further reinforced how decolonization and indigenous sovereignty are integral to each other.

As for the future of museums and decolonization, both Cook and Stewart had similar responses. Cook challenged the idea of tribal “museums,” stating,

“Do I think it's a glass box in a casino? Probably not. Do I think it has to be called a museum? Probably not. I would prefer if it was all a cultural center or, you know, get away from that... 'I'm going to a museum.' Where you're actually going to a place where there are gatherings and events, and then decide what's going to go inside it. I think a museum is a hard thing to live up to for the Tribe.”

Stewart shared a similar view about the future possibility of indigenous repositories, cared for by the communities they represent, and only accessed by non-Native institutions with permission from the associated tribal nations.

In all the responses from tribal members, the CTGR community was centered in the discussion of decolonization, sovereignty, and healing. As Cook described, “I think that people need to be reminded of the spirituality. And that's part of building trust and building that relationship that's strong. And the tribes are. Our Tribe is very strong and I think they look forward to that. We're on the right path, I think.”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to listen to indigenous perspectives about repatriation to identify themes that can inform the movement for repatriating outside of NAGPRA and utilizing decolonization methodologies in museums and repatriation processes. The CTGR strive to honor their ancestors, sovereignty, and futurity for their community. Speaking to staff from Chachalu, each person spoke primarily as CTGR tribal members to share their perspectives outside of a museum context. The responses were diverse, yet they converged on the same values of pursuing healing for their tribal community.

When describing the challenges of repatriation, one of the repeated responses that CTGR tribal members shared was about institutions not repatriating in a way that was fulfilling for the Tribe. The concept of “fulfillment,” or what can be regarded as a successful repatriation, is a personal definition for each tribal member, and indigenous person in general. During interviews, tribal members shared experiences about compromises, collection loans, and the legal language of NAGPRA. Some tribal members identified these experiences as fulfilling repatriation, and some identified those same outcomes as continued undermining of indigenous sovereignty. The expressed inefficacy of NAGPRA from tribal members echoes Bruchac (2010), who says the “greatest flaw” of NAGPRA is that “the law remains (as it was at the outset) an imperfect compromise” (p. 148). The power of that compromise will always favor the institutions that can argue “right of possession,” although cultivating long-term relationships with institutions can recontextualize those compromises with a deeper understanding of indigenous lifeways and sovereignties to perhaps renegotiate those compromises in the future.

The barrier of possession is a core value of settler colonialism, and deconstructing that barrier is essential for institutions to honor indigenous sovereignty in repatriation processes. Settler colonialism constructs narratives to protect itself and its right to stolen land, and “the dehumanizing impulses of colonization are successfully acted upon because racisms in these countries are predicated on the logic of possession” (Moreton-Robinson, 2016, p. xiii). The logic of possession can manifest in many different arguments, as CTGR tribal members pointed out, institutions may demand tribes to have “adequate” collection facilities and exhibits. Or, as in the case with Tomanowos, the institution may argue that the logistics for repatriation and removal of their physical holdings is too burdensome to pursue (Jurgensen, 2000). Underlying these arguments of institutional loss, is the fact that “white colonial paranoia is inextricably tied to an anxiety about being dispossessed by racial others” (Moreton-Robinson, 2016, p. xxiii).

To appease those fears of dispossession, indigenous people may navigate institutional defensiveness by appearing as non-threatening and collaborative as possible. During the interviews with CTGR tribal members, there were multiple points about this form of labor, including “walking in two worlds” and “infiltrating” to earn the trust of institutions who hold the Tribe’s ancestors and belongings. This experience is not unique to negotiating with museums, as indigenous people collectively must grapple with the ways in which their identities are constructed in settler imaginations. Simpson (2017) asserts that “to

be Indigenous is to be structured into this position of scarcity;" thus, indigenous peoples are seen as a threatening encroachment to colonial power while simultaneously being perceived as scarce defenders of their lifeways and ancestral lands (p. 6).

Moreover, CTGR tribal members shared vulnerable discussions about indigenous identity. The topic of cultural affiliation and NAGPRA has been under scrutiny by indigenous nations and institutions for years, and while new NAGPRA regulations could benefit the repatriation process, the barriers for indigenous healing are rooted in persisting colonial constructs. Namely, the colonial origins of *Indian* identity of which indigenous people and institutions are deeply entangled.

Tribal members shared how harmful, contradictory, and disorienting the settler conceptualization of indigenous identity is during the repatriation process. The origins of this racialized monolithic identity "served to fulfill manifest destiny" (Doerfler, 2015, p. 30). Thus, as demands for decolonization become more visible, the reality of indigenous identities will continue to refuse the racialization and white possession of Indian fantasies that have justified settler occupation on stolen land. In CTGR's repatriation work, they have demonstrated how valuable relationship-building is to combat false conceptions of their tribal identity, culture, and history. It is through this practice of collaboration and "infiltration" that CTGR has shifted settler perspectives in institutions to not only bring belongings and ancestors home, but to impart traditional knowledge onto those institutions to transform their exhibit design, interpretation, and collections care.

Moreover, CTGR tribal members also discussed how institutional accountability can be healing for Native people. Throughout the interviews, CTGR tribal members did not focus solely on the intricacies of NAGPRA; instead, they remarked on how institutions should be doing the work because it is their responsibility, regardless of right of possession. While legal language can be used to argue for retaining indigenous collections, "museums have an ethical responsibility to make an honest attempt to fix what was broken by their own actions, irrespective of legal obligations" (Bruchac, 2010, p. 150). Furthermore, the burden of labor cannot be solely on indigenous communities to bring their ancestors and belongings home and must instead involve "multi-party responsibility" from relevant institutions (Kakaliouras, 2017, p. 188). Overall, CTGR tribal members expressed similar perspectives when asked about how museum professionals can improve their repatriation work: abandon monolithic assumptions about indigenous people and take initiative in the repatriation process.

Indigenous healing and futurity can look different for every indigenous person and community, and tribal members also emphasized how institutions will need to connect emotionally with the repatriation process to build more empathetic understanding for the indigenous communities they serve. Discussions about spiritual connections to ancestors and belongings, the trauma of their removal, and the emotional labor to bring them home were a significant part of interview responses. The disconnect between institutions and indigenous communities on perspectives of repatriation demonstrates the lack of cultural and spiritual understanding of ancestors and belongings. It is that same disconnect that Riding-In (2005) describes as the logic of settler possession: “The perpetrators disregarded our views, beliefs, and rights because colonialism instills the colonizer with a notion of absolute entitlement” (p. 53). To overcome that disconnect, CTGR tribal members spoke of methods to build emotional investment from institutions, mainly through long-term relationship building. Through building trust and emotional connection, perhaps questions like Atanacio’s will no longer have to be asked: “Why would you fight me? Why would you fight me on it if I truly care and love and feel real connection?”

Limitations

This study was conducted with a small sample of CTGR tribal members who only spoke from their own perspectives and do not represent the opinions and goals of indigenous people collectively. Additionally, other CTGR tribal members may have perspectives that differ from those represented in this study, so these results cannot be interpreted as the community’s consensus on repatriation processes. The discussion of repatriation was also limited to processes involving North American indigenous communities, therefore it does not include the further analysis of other stakeholder communities.

Implications

The reflections shared by CTGR tribal members in this study can be impactful for various facets of repatriation work. Indigenous perspectives are individual and diverse, and the CTGR tribal members who shared their experiences, emotions, and needs must be listened to attentively. For institutions engaging with repatriation work, the implications of this study can prompt the reflection necessary to do this work empathetically and effectively. In their reflections, CTGR tribal

members expressed a need for institutions to collaborate directly with indigenous communities, deconstruct their racialized perspectives of Native peoples, and prioritize indigenous sovereignty and healing over compromises that favor institutional control.

The responses from CTGR tribal members also spoke directly to other indigenous people, particularly those of us who are working to bring ancestors, belongings, and knowledge home. They spoke of cultivating long-term relationships and using patience and empathy to build trust with institutions. Tribal members also emphasized the emotional and spiritual connections with repatriation work, advising indigenous people to continue connecting with their community to harness strength from their identity and ancestors. For those indigenous communities looking to create cultural centers like Chachalu, this study provided perspectives about reimagining tribal “museums” as community spaces, honoring the life of belongings outside of display cases, and strategizing within the community to build capacity for repatriation.

Most paramount, this study centered CTGR tribal members to uplift their perspectives and allow them to lead the discussion on repatriation. For institutions that may work with CTGR for repatriation, this study will hopefully welcome more relationship-building and collaboration. However, this study is for the Tribe’s benefit first and foremost, and all indigenous peoples who are doing the work to secure futurity and healing for their communities.

Repatriation is not concise; it is not simply defined or enacted. The process begins in the self, in our connection with identity, ancestors, and empathy. However, the manifestation of the repatriation process is often resigned to the labyrinth of legal language and cold logistics. Indigenous communities have long known the trauma of repatriation, as well as its potential for healing. However, the disconnect between institutions and Native nations exemplifies how settler colonialism is deeply entangled in structures and self. Addressing the disconnect, or (re)connecting, is not a process that can be solely carried by the indigenous people who have asked repeatedly for their belongings and ancestors to come home. Institutions, and their practitioners, have a significant responsibility to examine the colonial legacies they uphold, even when the surface appears progressive. As an Inupiaq person working in repatriation, I am too familiar with the feelings that CTGR tribal members expressed; but, most of all, I resonate with the same knowledge that repatriation can (and must) be healing, and the journey to that future must proceed with indigenous sovereignty at its center.

Acknowledgments

Quyanaqpak to everyone who walked with me all these years. I want to express my gratitude and love for all my mothers: Dominique Mainon, Tahirah Hendricks, and Kathy Meziere. I want to also say quyana to my brother, Liam McNeeley, for sharing the reconnection journey with me. To all my other family and friends, I am grateful for all your patience, support, and generous care. Special thanks to my committee members Jean Dennison and Miranda Belarde-Lewis, who have been extraordinary mentors from afar. And of course, there are no words to express my gratitude and love for the CTGR community who continue to welcome me and share so many healing moments. Many blessings to you all.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Justice McNeeley | Phone: (253)-202-0446 | Email: jdmn@uw.edu

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jessica Luke, Museology Graduate Program, University of Washington

Phone: (206)-685-3496 | Email: jjluke@uw.edu

Consent Script:

I am asking you to participate in a research study that is part of my Master's Thesis work at the University of Washington in Seattle. The purpose of this research is to analyze repatriation from an indigenous perspective to demonstrate methods or needs for applying decolonization methodology to repatriation processes.

Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits, and you may discontinue participation at any time.

This interview session will last approximately 45-60 minutes. This session will be recorded for easier transcription, and the audio files will not be shared publicly. I would like to use direct quotes from your responses, but you may request to remain anonymous if you do not want to be attributed in the study results. I will give you the opportunity to review any direct quotes before publication. If you have any questions now or in the future, please contact me or my advisor.

Do you agree to participate in this interview?

Note:

You are not being asked to speak for the entirety of your community or institution. Questions involving the impacts of repatriation on your community are recognized as your personal perspective, not the consensus for the entire community.

Also, repatriation (or rematriation) is a complex system that can be defined and interacted with in many different ways. These questions are meant to be open to interpretation, so you are not constrained to speaking only in the context of NAGPRA as a guide for repatriation. You are welcome to bring forth any experiences or interpretations of repatriation whether they include federal policies or not.

Interview Questions

Introductions:

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself, such as: your name, tribal affiliation (if any), and your community role or job position. This information is for my reference, and you may choose to withhold any of your personal information from being published.

Repatriation:

1. Can you describe to me your understanding of repatriation?
2. What goals, either personal or community defined, do you want to see achieved through repatriation?
3. Are there any examples from repatriation cases or processes involving your community that have fulfilled these goals? Why or why not?
4. From your own perspective, what makes repatriation processes complicated or challenging to navigate through for your community?

Decolonization:

5. With your understanding of repatriation and decolonization, do you have any thoughts about how decolonization methods can better center indigenous sovereignties in the repatriation process?

OR;

6. In other words, what actions or methods do you think institutions need to try?

Impact:

7. Are there any repatriation methods you've experienced in your community that you think should be replicated in other institutions?
8. In your perspective, what would you like museum professionals to know to make repatriation more fulfilling for indigenous communities?
9. Do you have any other reflections or knowledge that you'd like to share with other institutions and indigenous peoples who are pursuing repatriation?

Conclusion:

That concludes all the questions I require for this study. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments that you would like to share?


If you are finished with your answers, we can close out the interview session now. I will be in touch with you about any direct quotes I choose to use in the study. I will also happily share the final publication with you, if you are interested. Please let me know if you have any questions, concerns, or additional thoughts by contacting me through my email (jdmn@uw.edu) or phone number at (253)-202-0446. I greatly appreciate your time to help with this study. Thank you again for your participation and vulnerability during this process. Quyan!

Appendix B

Correspondence between American Museum of Natural History and Repatriation Research Consultants, February 2000

FEB 28 '00 10:03AM

P.2

American Museum of Natural History 

February 28, 2000

via e-mail and postal delivery

Ryan and Adrienne Heavy Head,
Repatriation Research Consultants
1530 Stonehedge Dr. N.E.
Salem, OR 97303

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Heavy Head:

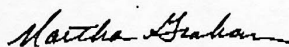
We acknowledge receipt of your fax of Friday, February 25. We regret that you turned down our offer to meet and discuss resolution of this matter prior to the Museum being forced, by a deadline, to issue its final decision.

We therefore respectfully present our finding and determination. After careful and sensitive review, we found that the claim of the Grand Ronde to the Willamette Meteorite did not meet the requirements of NAGPRA. It failed to establish the Meteorite as the kind of object subject to repatriation, and failed to establish ownership and control of it as required by NAGPRA. Further, the claim failed to show the Museum lacked right of possession as defined in the terms of NAGPRA. Had the Grand Ronde established the Museum lacked a right of possession, a repatriation would still not be required, as upon advise of counsel, it would constitute a taking under the United States Constitution such that otherwise applicable property law would apply and show ownership and right of possession to be with the Museum.

Because this is a matter we all want to see promptly resolved, we are initiating suit in the federal court of the Southern District of New York for a declaration of our ownership rights to the Meteorite and a determination of your claim. Our counsel will forward to the General Counsel of the Grand Ronde a courtesy copy of the complaint without delay.

This notwithstanding, we remain available in New York to meet and discuss resolution of this matter, should you now wish to do so.

Sincerely,



Martha Graham, Ph.D.
Registrar for Cultural Resources
Department of Anthropology

cc: *Kathryn Harrison, Chairperson, Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon via fax and postal delivery*

Central Park West at 79th Street, New York, N.Y. 10024-5192, USA 212-769-5000

Appendix C

Correspondence between students of Forest Hills Elementary School and the American Museum-Hayden Planetarium, September 1990



American
Museum-
Hayden
Planetarium

September 17, 1990

Fourth Grade Pupils
of Forest Hills Elementary School
1133 S.W. Andrews Road
Lake Oswego, Oregon 97034

Dear Fourth Grade Pupils:

Thank you for the letters concerning the Willamette Meteorite. After receiving them, as well as letters from Dr. Dabrowski of the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, and senior political representatives of Oregon, we gave serious consideration to the matter.

Many important points have been discussed here. Major concern rests on the unique scientific importance of this meteorite, and the scientific research that has and will be done on it as part of one of the most important collections of meteorites in the world. Through the hard work of many scientists, including some in Oregon, the American Museum of Natural History has carefully assembled and continues to assemble meteorites from all over the world so that scientists from everywhere may travel here to study them in order to better understand the origin of the solar system, the planets, and especially the Earth.

Even ignoring the extremely high cost of safely removing the 14-ton meteorite from the American Museum-Hayden Planetarium (which would involve removing walls, closing exhibit halls, and the cancellation of some programs) and transporting it across country, our scientists here believe that shipping it away would cause irreparable harm to the meteorite itself, and the ability of scientists to study it in the context of the related collection.

Those of you who have stamp or coin collections will understand. Each stamp or coin has value, but, frequently, if a critical stamp or coin is lost from a set, the importance of the whole set suffers. Indeed, the collection may then be worth less than the total of all the individual stamps or coins.

Graham Rasmussen
c/o Dear Mrs. Johnson,
This is the letter the
museum ^{sent} back to us. We are
answering this letter by:
1. The Willamette Meteorite
is a piece of Oregon's
history.

2. We think it would
get better care and
more attention in Oregon.
3. H. E. W. M. A. C. has
gained support to have the
Planetarium and
transported across
country
safely.
Call me
if you
need
more
info.
Graham
Rasmussen