

Review: Forging Indigenous Methodologies on Cape Flattery: The Makah Museum as a Center of Collaborative Research

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REVIEW ESSAYS

Forging Indigenous Methodologies on Cape Flattery

The Makah Museum as a Center of Collaborative Research

JANINE BOWECHOP AND PATRICIA PIERCE ERIKSON

REFLECTING ON DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGIES

In her compelling book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes how the study of Indigenous people is part of an ongoing legacy of imperialism.¹ She describes how colonized peoples have recognized imperialism as a “discursive field of knowledge,” a field that authoritatively describes and defines Indigenous identities. She argues that an imperial vision or gaze has for centuries distorted views of Indigenous people, reducing Indigenous notions of humanity, family, or gender relations, to name a few, to social constructions of what colonists and their descendants consider to be “authentically” Native or Other.² Her valuable contribution is that she augments this deconstructive critique with a discussion of how Indigenous communities, including her own Maori one, are meeting the “need to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity.”³ To document the opening of these spaces for recovery, Smith describes a range of Indigenous projects that are developing or practicing Indigenous research methodologies.

When we learned that the *American Indian Quarterly* was inviting reflections on *Decolonizing Methodologies*, we decided to join others in offering an account of how Native American community museums and cultural centers are among those projects that can create a space for recovering traditional knowledge and countering dominant ideologies.⁴ If the decolonizing project is to “carve a space where Indigenous values and knowledge are respected; to create an environment that supports research and methodologies useful to Indigenous nation building,” then tribal museums and cultural centers are emerging as a promising space for this work.⁵ The case of the Makah Cultural and Research Center

(MCRC) also offers the opportunity to describe the nature of doing this work with those whom Mihesuah and Wilson call “non-Indigenous allies.”⁶

RECOVERING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN NATIVE AMERICAN MUSEUMS AND CULTURAL CENTERS

The MCRC on the Makah Indian Reservation in Washington State is one example of a large number of Indigenous museums and cultural centers that have emerged throughout the Western Hemisphere, beginning predominantly, but not exclusively, in the latter half of the twentieth century.⁷ Currently, more than one hundred Native urban and reservation communities in the United States host a wide variety of tribal museums.⁸ Collectively, these tribal museums have generated practices and representations that can offer substantive alternatives to stereotypic or anachronistic images of Native peoples. They have also served a vital function in remediating some of the dehumanizing historic practices of museology (such as collection and exhibition of human remains).⁹ In some communities, tribal museums can serve as an important anchor for training and employing tribal members in a community-directed cultural- or eco-tourism project.

Most relevant to our reflection upon *Decolonizing Methodologies*, however, is that tribal museums and cultural centers can serve as a tool to reclaim practices based upon traditional values; they also can serve as a base for conducting research whose ethics and design are relevant to community needs. Tribal museums, like museums in general, find themselves at the intersection of several media and technologies for representing culture and history, including academia, museology, and popular culture. This makes them a particularly effective space for what Smith calls “researching back” or what Erikson calls “museum autoethnography.”¹⁰

In the case of the MCRC, the museum is staffed by nine Makah tribal members. The staff faces the challenge of meeting the expectations and needs of the tribe, in part, conveyed by the twelve-member, all-Makah Board of Trustees, while they negotiate the expectations of colleagues in the international field of cultural preservation and its associated disciplines. This movement of Makah researchers between different spaces and systems for constructing knowledge has involved a significant amount of collaborative research with non-Native colleagues. We are not speaking here of “collaboration” where an ethnographer is the subject and “the Native” is the object of study. Rather, we refer to joint intellectual work or coalition building, while acknowledging the need to guard

against the ongoing potential for hegemonic practices to undermine collaborative research *processes and structures*.¹¹

Smith acknowledges that some non-Indigenous individuals have developed ways of working with Indigenous peoples on a variety of projects “in an ongoing and mutually beneficial way.”¹² She later summarizes Graham Smith’s four different models by which culturally appropriate research can be accomplished in partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers: the mentoring model, the adoption model, the power sharing model, and the empowering outcomes model.¹³ The collaborative research projects involving the Makah Tribe have spanned these different models. In this article, we describe how Makah decolonization of research methodologies has intertwined with the development of intertribal and cross-cultural research ethics and methods. These cross-cultural alliances make possible what Mario Caro calls “a strategic intervention that locates specific sites of emerging resistance to hegemony.”¹⁴ Although Caro here refers to the collaborative production of literature as a site of intervention, he notes that the collaborative format offers potential elsewhere—we suggest in the type of museums discussed here. When Native American researchers and communities choose to work with receptive, non-Native colleagues, they strategically select opportunities to move counter-hegemonic ideas and practices into multiple institutions and disciplines that have been historically resistant to Indigenous knowledge systems.

In the spirit of encouraging others to tackle the challenge of dismantling colonial methodologies, this article offers a few of the experiences of Makah and non-Makah colleagues negotiating between the Makah community and academic and museological communities, in effect, negotiating between different spaces and systems of knowledge construction. This account entails a partial history of some of the Makah cultural preservation and revitalization projects that have been opening space(s) for forging Indigenous research methodologies for more than two decades.

A CENTER FOR REVITALIZING MAKAH CULTURE

As Smith emphasizes, the development of Indigenous research methodologies does not follow formulas, but rather emerges in the context of specific community needs and values. The needs of the Makah Tribal Community have been diverse and interrelated over time, ranging from the protection of treaty-secured rights to the stimulation of the community’s public and economic health to the preservation and development

of cultural and natural resources. One event, in particular, fortuitously brought together these diverse needs and generated a new Makah institution—the MCRC.

The archaeological excavation of Ozette and the opening of the MCRC in 1979 are dramatic examples of turning points in the history of how research has been conducted by and with respect to Makah people. The Ozette excavation began in 1970. A winter storm exposed artifacts at the Ozette village site on the Pacific Ocean about fifteen miles south of the present-day village of Neah Bay. The Makah Tribal Council called in Dr. Richard Daugherty of Washington State University who had previously conducted archaeological work in the immediate vicinity. The Makah Tribe, in collaboration with Washington State University, the National Park Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs began an excavation that would last eleven years and uncover over 55,000 precontact Makah artifacts and 15,000 structural remains from at least four houses that were buried in a mudslide.¹⁵ Given the location of the excavation on tribal land, the Makah Tribe retained ownership and control over the artifacts, despite the involvement of university-based archaeologists and federal funding and logistical support.¹⁶

A cadre of Makah youth joined WSU students and faculty in excavating Ozette. The Makah crew brought a sense of historical continuity to the excavation. The Makah described how their ancestors had launched canoes from that beach and bathed nearby. Students shared stories of this with the non-Native crew. They shared where to dig for clams, the names for birds, and showed them how to bone game. Makah and non-Makah archaeologists together witnessed the unearthing of harpoons that hadn't been seen for hundreds of years. These were etched with designs that identified their original owner. The non-Native excavation crew members were profoundly effected.¹⁷ They developed a respect for the connections between the past and the present. Many of these archaeologists have functioned as tribal advocates since the excavation, particularly through the 1990s.¹⁸

This cross-cultural collaboration extended from excavation through exhibit planning and development. A few years into the excavation the tribe began plans to build a museum in order to share the Ozette collection with the Makah community and with the interested general public. At that point the Makah Tribe began working with Native and non-Native museum professionals from the Royal British Columbia Museum (formerly Provincial Museum) and the University of Washington. These consultants and educators worked alongside Makah people, partnering

with the tribe so that they could tell their story from the Makah perspective in a manner that effectively reached museum visitors—Makah and non-Makah.¹⁹

Makah students who excavated Ozette, and had previously excavated the Hoko River site and conducted associated archaeological surveys and labwork, laid the groundwork for a new generation of Makah cultural specialists and researchers. The emergence of artifacts raised questions in the younger generation about material culture and practices, questions which they then took to Elders. This created an extraordinary environment for learning.²⁰ These Makah youths had the opportunity to combine Makah traditional knowledge—passed down through oral history and through the teaching of living Elders—with cultural information obtained archaeologically. Out of the sixteen Makah youths involved in the Ozette excavation, 50 percent of them have held cultural preservation positions as of 2001. Four of these governed the MCRC and one was an interpretive specialist.²¹ Bowechop, among those who replicated Ozette artifacts for MCRC display and who excavated at Hoko River, currently directs the Makah museum.

MAKAH METHODOLOGY: COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT

The MCRC has enabled the Makah people to bring Makah values to the center of research concerns on the reservation. Bringing Makah and non-Makah colleagues together has generated new questions, interpretations, and artifact classification and curation techniques. Collections management is just one of the many ways to discuss how MCRC is incorporating Indigenous methodologies. Originally, access to the Ozette archaeological collection was through traditional, *archaeological* artifact categories. While this system enabled access to the artifacts, it failed to reflect Makah values and cultural concerns centering around traditional property rights. It also failed to reflect cultural sanctions concerning the handling of certain items. At best, it was neutral to such values and concerns. At worst, it detracted from them. The construction of a new curatorial facility in 1993 provided the opportunity for developing a system that reflected the values and concerns of the Makah people.²²

While developing a collections management system for the new facility, the collections management staff—a Makah and non-Makah team—was reminded that values associated with the traditional system of property ownership still existed in the Neah Bay community. Early ethnographies record that Makah society had a strongly developed sense

of ownership over tangible properties (tools, designs, berry-picking, and fishing locations, for example) and intangible properties (songs, stories, and skills, for example).²³ Consequently, the staff began separating and storing Ozette artifacts not only within artifact categories but also by household. The inclusion of household designations on the shelf labeling allowed the museum to preserve an important category—the distinction between Ozette houses, each of which represented an extended family or household with several related nuclear families organized under a single head.²⁴

The collections management system developed in the early 1990s also took into account the importance of preserving and supporting the use of Makah language, *q^wi·q^wi dičcaq*. Consequently, the collections staff began labeling artifacts in both Makah and English. A major innovation was the physical grouping of artifacts according to their Makah roots and/or suffixes. Physically storing and labeling the Ozette collection according to relationships reflected in the Makah language encouraged analysis of the cultural meanings and affinities between artifacts in the collection and provided insight into both Makah language and thought (figure 1). Former collections manager, Jeffrey Mauger, described one of these insights as follows:

For twenty years, canoe paddles were [stored] off with canoe gear, wedges were with wedges and maybe woodworking tools . . . There's no relation between those other than the fact that wedges and paddles are out of wood . . . [when] we noticed that a number of names are starting with [barred lambda a], and we physically collected [canoe paddles, wedges, and chisels] we had to physically break out of our own English thinking . . . Here was this group of tools that started with lambda a . . . we had to put them beside each other and—literally put them on the same range of shelving—and stand back [and ask], “what do these have in common?”²⁵

What the staff realized was that this group of tools—a chisel, a wedge, an adze, a canoe paddle—shared a working surface that was perpendicular to the plane of action. Makah conceptual categories became used not only for organizing the collection but also for stimulating reflection on Makah worldviews codified in their language. This adaptation of the museum—to expand the preservation goals beyond the preservation of artifacts to the preservation of a *living culture*—is an essential component of the Indigenization of the mainstream museum model.²⁶



Figure 1.

The MCRC has opened a space for proactively aligning Makah values with research. This raises the issue of how the Makah Tribe has come to handle the *process* of research on the reservation, particularly where non-Makah researchers are concerned.

RESEARCH PROTOCOLS AND REMAINING CHALLENGES

Given the objectives of recovering traditional knowledge systems and making those available to the hosting community, can collaborative research support the development of Indigenous methodologies and follow the principles of self-determination and decolonization? What are some of the challenges and points of progress that we have experienced? The MCRC is a research center in its own right, developing fluid teams of specialists to address community needs or opportunities as they arise. At times this has meant presenting an artifact as evidence in court at a treaty rights case that litigates the scope of Indigenous fishing technology or documenting historic Makah use of various land and marine cultural properties.²⁷ The MCRC constitutes an institution through which the Makah researchers, artisans, educators, and others actively construct

knowledge about themselves. In the history of MCRC this work often has entailed intensive collaboration with non-Native researchers, particularly anthropologists, historians, and biologists.

The Makah Tribal Council has authorized the MCRC Board of Trustees to screen and oversee the non-Makah research that takes place on the reservation. Prior to any fieldwork on the Makah Reservation, researchers are required to submit a packet to the MCRC Board of Trustees which includes a résumé and a detailed account of the nature and objectives of the proposed research. After reviewing proposal materials, the MCRC can (and has) refuse research on the grounds that the subject is culturally inappropriate. The board or staff may decide to assist in retooling the research design (for example, such that it includes the participation of Elders or alters the approach to Elders), or they may choose to advise or direct researchers toward rich resources of which they are unaware. The MCRC staff is also responsible for advising researchers that they must follow the MCRC protocol for gathering oral histories.

Approval from the Makah Board dictates that a final copy of the research needs to be deposited at MCRC and a report made before the Makah Tribal Council. In this way MCRC acts as a repository for research that takes place on the reservation, ensuring community accessibility. In part, this ensures against what a former board member described to Erikson as “the helicopter effect.” He asked, “Do you know what the ‘helicopter effect’ is?: You, and the information you gather, get into the helicopter and fly away. That’s it.” The specter here is the persistent draining away of cultural documentation from the community and the centralization of this information in non-Native museums and universities for the purpose of making authoritative or “official” knowledge about Native peoples.²⁸

The colonial model of knowledge production ascribes the center of knowledge making onto the university and museums and the object of research onto the Native American community at a purported “periphery.”²⁹ The long tradition of social scientists taking their research materials with them has given the MCRC Archive department years and years of work in tracking down these materials in university archives, museums, and private homes and duplicating them, where possible, so that they remain available for Makah research. Tribal museums, such as the MCRC, seek to reconfigure Native American communities as authoritative centers, or perhaps nodes, of knowledge making in their own right.

While these research protocols have made tremendous progress toward increasing Makah control over research conducted on the reserva-

tion, many challenges remain. Some institutions continue to resist the idea of the MCRC as a *primary* repository for research materials. For example, on one occasion a non-Makah researcher was caught between the MCRC research protocols and the obligation to an agency that had funded her field research. The agency wanted the primary field materials to be deposited in their repository. The research was, however, carried out under the approval of the MCRC and required deposition in the MCRC Archives, under the control of the MCRC staff and board. After considerable discussion with both parties, identical sets of materials were deposited in both repositories, but with control over them retained by the MCRC Board. This experience points to the challenges that remain for researchers—Makah and non-Makah—in meeting research funding obligations and negotiating the overarching power structures that contextualize the self-determination process.

In this reflection on *Decolonizing Methodologies* we have described how tribal museums, such as the MCRC, can serve as essential spaces for Native American communities to develop Indigenous research methodologies and forward their own self-determination objectives. These museums and cultural centers are in an ideal position for answering and moving beyond what Smith calls the “They came, They saw, They named, They claimed” aspect of the colonial project.³⁰ We have also described how non-Native colleagues may be successfully involved in these strategic interventions, so long as tribes can determine the research objectives and ensure the truly collaborative nature of the research process and structure.

NOTES

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2. See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

3. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 23.

4. For example, James Clifford, “Four Northwest Coast Museums,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. I. Karp and S. D. Lavine, 212–54 (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992); Nancy Fuller, “The Museum as a Vehicle for Community Empowerment: The

Ak-Chin Indian Community Ecomuseum Project,” in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Kreamer, and Steven Lavine, 327–66 (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

5. Devon A. Mihesuah and Angela C. Wilson, *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 2.

6. Mihesuah and Wilson, *Indigenizing the Academy*, 2.

7. Patricia Pierce Erikson with Helma Ward and Kirk Wachendorf, *Voices of a Thousand People: The Makah Cultural and Research Center* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 31–37; Russell P. Hartman, “Preserving a People’s Heritage: A History of the Navajo Tribal Museum,” *Kiva* 47, no. 4 (1982): 239–55; Duane King, “History of the Museum of the Cherokee Indian,” *Journal of Cherokee Studies* 1, no. 1 (1976): 60–64.

8. Karen Coody Cooper, *Tribal Museum Directory* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Center for Museum Studies, 1998); Nancy Fuller and Suzanne Fabricius, “Tribal Museums,” in *Native America in the Twentieth Century: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Mary B. Davis, 655–57 (New York: Garland, 1994).

9. Ann M. Tweedie, *Drawing Back Culture: The Makah Struggle for Repatriation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

10. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 80.

11. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 14.

12. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 17.

13. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 177.

14. Mario A. Caro, “Desiring the End of Testimonio: Rigoberta Menchú Inside the Teaching Machine,” *European Journal for Semiotic Studies* 9, no. 1 (1997): 11–32, (quote taken from p. 18).

15. Janine Bovechop, “Working Outside of NAGPRA,” paper presented at Western Museum Association Conference, October 20, 2003; Maria Parker Pasqua, “A Makah Village in 1491: Ozette,” *National Geographic* 184, no. 10 (1991): 38–53; Jeffrey E. Mauger, “Shed Reef Houses at the Ozette Archaeological Site: A Prehistoric Architectural System,” Project Report no. 73 (Pullman: Washington Archaeological Research Center, Washington State University, 1978).

16. Erikson, Ward, and Wachendorf, *Voices of a Thousand People*, 134–42.

17. Jeffrey E. Mauger, Oral history transcription from an interview by Patricia P. Erikson (Neah Bay WA: MCRC Archives, 1994).

18. Janine Bovechop, “The Makah Tribe and the Archaeological Community: A Thirty Year Perspective,” paper presented at “On the Threshold: Native American Archaeologist Relations in the Twenty-First Century” (Hanover NH: Dartmouth College, May 25–27, 2001).

19. Jean André, Oral history transcription from an interview by Patricia P.

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20. Bowe chop, "The Makah Tribe and the Archaeological Community."

21. Bowe chop, "The Makah Tribe and the Archaeological Community."

22. Jeffrey E. Mauger and Janine Bowe chop, "Tribal Collections Management at the MCRC," *A Resource for Tribal Museums 2* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1995).

23. Tweedie, *Drawing Back Culture*.

24. Mauger and Bowe chop, "Tribal Collections Management at the MCRC."

25. Mauger, Oral history transcription.

26. Erikson, Ward, and Wachendorf, *Voices of a Thousand People*, 184.

27. Greig Arnold quoted in Robin Cutler, "A Gift from the Past," *Indian America Series*, videocassette, 60 min. (Washington DC: Media Resource Associates, 1994).

28. Erikson, Ward, and Wachendorf, *Voices of a Thousand People*, 62.

29. James Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones," in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, by James Clifford, 188–219 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 193.

30. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 80–83.