

Lecture 20: Heritage policy at the Smithsonian Institution? By Sita Reddy, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage

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What is needed to craft effective heritage policy for 21st century museums? Sita Reddy tries to answer this question by highlighting changes in museum practice related to global cultural policy imperatives of democracy, justice, equity, and voice. The Smithsonian Institution (SI) has responded to these shifts by creating a variety of cultural activities that respect communities of culture bearers and their traditions. One significant area of focus is music as heritage and the community-based management of this heritage.

The practices of Smithsonian Folkways embody the SI's support of the aforementioned cultural policy imperatives. This organization seeks to safeguard music heritage for future generations and to promote it to the wider public. It also prioritizes restitution for source communities, including digital heritage repatriation and the development of access and use control policies that correspond with local traditions.

1. Heritage Policy at the Smithsonian Institution

"What heritage policy at the Smithsonian?

Let me know when you find it."

Richard Kurin, 2012

What would an integrated, collaboratory heritage policy look like at the Smithsonian Institution (SI)? In fact, there is no unitary policy that all museums within the SI must implement. Nonetheless, various aspects of programming approaches reflect the SI's emphasis on cultural sensitivity, such as collaborative curation projects, local community involvement initiatives, broad public access policies, the creation of safe spaces to encourage open dialogue, and responsible restitution methods.

Regarding returns and restitution practices at the SI, some sacred objects and human remains have been returned to American Indian communities according to NAGPRA. Antiquities from the colonial era and works of art obtained during World War II by the Freer and Sackler Galleries were also returned to their places of origin after provenance was determined. More recently, digital returns have played a crucial role in creating a platform for source communities to participate in shared heritage management and control the circulation of indigenous knowledge.

2. Music restitution and repatriation at Smithsonian Folkways

This project recognizes cultural rights according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 27). Cultural rights and music returns transcend concepts of ownership and individual artistic expression, but can be viewed most productively through the frame of moral rights. This approach

represents the new way in which museums, as cultural brokers and stewards, are thinking through museum obligations for intangible cultural heritage and extending licenses and royalties to the artists or "communities of artists."

Digital returns can be transformative for communities both in material terms and in how they impact the circulation of indigenous knowledge, as they offer a means to control terms of use.¹ In fact, the production and dissemination of recorded music lies at the heart of worldwide cultural wars, and the work of this organization challenges the market forces that threaten the agency of artists. Smithsonian Folkways maintains a unique heritage archive and nonprofit recording label with the goal of keeping its catalogue available in perpetuity, against the vagaries of the marketplace. Additionally, it balances revenue needs with cultural documentation, collaborative curation and global appeal.

2.1. Abayudaya: revitalizing community

The Abayudaya Jewish music album of 2000 represents the musical and religious life of an entire community through local Ugandan music. The music is comprised of rich choral singing that combines influences from 19th century European music and traditional drummers. This album won a Grammy award in 2005 for "best traditional world music album." The royalties were returned to the community, who decided to use them to fund 19 university scholarships.

The Interfaith Coffee Cooperative recorded the album *Delicious Peace* in 2012. 300 farmers from the cooperative sang on themes ranging from fair trade to agriculture. The project truly changed the definition of community, and illustrated the difficulty of defining community in terms of benefit sharing

2.2. Bosavi: right to control use

This project illustrates an act of redistribution through the extraordinary gesture of the compiler. In 1991, Steven Feld created the album, "Voices of the Rainforest" with the Bosavi people. The royalties from the project were placed in a fund controlled by the community, and they used the money to build schools and clinics. They also decided to use the royalties from recordings over 10 years to create a Bosavi digital archive, to construct a music room in the middle of the jungle, and to provide educational scholarships for younger generations.

2.3. Western Australian desert aborigines: right to secrecy

This project speaks to the complicated issue of the right to secrecy over sacred knowledge. In 1966, a recording was made for Folkways of songs of the Ngantajara people, but half of the records included male initiation rites and songs. These materials were traditionally restricted to initiates themselves. In 2008, Folkways was questioned by the tribal council about the propriety of the public availability of this sacred knowledge. According to the Museum's navigation of the law, female adolescents had the right to access the materials according to US free speech and copyright laws as well as the recording contract.

¹ Please read more: Coleman, Coombe and MacAlairt. 2009. "A Broken Record," *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation*. James O. Young and Conrad G. Brunk (Editors), Wiley-Blackwell.

After Australian representatives consulted with communities, they determined that the recordings should be restricted to everyone! The original recordist R.A. Gould agreed that the album should be taken out of print. This is an interesting case for further study about balancing respect for privacy with public access.

2.4. Kiowa Peyote: Right to hear ancestor's voices

This project explores the right to keep sacred knowledge in the public domain. In 1954, a recording of Washoe Peyotists² was "captured" when individuals were under the influence of peyote at an open prayer meeting. In 2004, the Washoe asked that the recording be taken out of the archive, and the SI complied. Later, in 2009, Folkways considered the propriety of another peyote recording from a Kiowa meeting in 1964. The SI consulted the tribal council, and the Chief replied: "100 years from now, we want our children to hear our music." Thus, the Kiowa recording was kept in circulation.

3. Implications: toward best practices and policies?

With regard to music returns, there are no universal concepts and measures that can be applied to all kinds of heritage projects. Recognizing the gaps, fault lines, and contestations that influence heritage safeguarding is just as important as, and integral to, achieving consensus. Many questions can be raised about the music returns process: what is community? How can we define traditional knowledge? Who controls the rights over access? Should sacred knowledge remain public?

We should question the goals of music restitution as well. It serves an archival purpose and also contributes to meeting indigenous social needs. Consequently, museums should not only respond to claims, but they must actively work towards redistributive justice policies and indigenous self-determination.

² Smoking peyote results in visions and is used in various Native American rituals.