

**Key Issues in Cultural Heritage**  
Series editors: William Logan and Laurajane Smith

## Intangible Heritage

Also in the series:

**Places of Pain and Shame, Dealing with "Difficult Heritage"**  
*William Logan and Keir Reeves*

Edited by  
**Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa**

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

- (1966b) *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.
- (2007) *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (1971) *Rammar Convention on Wetlands*.
- (1979) *Convention on Migratory Species*.
- (1992) *Convention on Biological Diversity*.
- (1994) *Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa*.

## Indigenous curation, museums, and intangible cultural heritage

Christina Kreps

Fifteen to 20 years ago, few curators working in an American museum housing Native American collections would have questioned their right to open and handle the contents of a sacred medicine bundle, to put an Iroquois false face mask on display, or to mount an exhibition without consulting representatives from the source community. These were the taken-for-granted, exclusive roles and responsibilities of curators working within professional guidelines and ethics of the time. However, as museums have been making efforts to become responsive to the needs and interests of their diverse constituencies, especially minority and Indigenous communities, they have become more inclusive of diverse perspectives and sensitive to the rights of people to have a voice in how their cultures are represented and their heritage curated. Today, collaboration between museums and source communities and the co-curation of collections and exhibitions has become commonplace in many museums (see Peers and Brown 2003). These activities have also inspired the development of more culturally relative and appropriate approaches to curatorial work (see Kreps 2008).

Collaboration and co-curation has also revealed how many Indigenous communities have their own curatorial traditions, or ways of perceiving, valuing, handling, caring for, interpreting, and preserving their cultural heritage. What we have learned is that just as museums are diverse in the multiple voices, perspectives, and identities they represent so too are approaches to curation and cultural heritage preservation.

While the recognition of Indigenous or non-Western approaches to curation has become *de rigueur* in some mainstream museums, Western-based and professionally oriented museological theory and practice continues to dominate the museum world. Indigenous curatorial traditions and approaches to heritage preservation are unique cultural expressions. As such, they should be recognised and preserved in their own right as part of a people's cultural heritage. They also, however, contribute to world, cultural diversity and have much to contribute to our understanding of museological behaviour cross-culturally, in addition to the formulation of new museological paradigms.

The growing awareness of Indigenous curation coincides with increased discussion within the international museum community on the place of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in museums. The discourse has been heightened since the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the *Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2003. Much of the discussion has focused on how museums can supplement their conventional tasks of curating and preserving tangible culture (objects and collections) with activities devoted to curating and preserving intangible, living cultural expressions (performing arts, skills, knowledge, and practices). If the intention is to more fully integrate ICH into museums rather than merely add it on to existing curatorial activities, greater attention needs to be given not only to what is curated, but also to how it is curated.

In this chapter, I examine how aspects of Indigenous curation are both a form of intangible cultural heritage as well as means of safeguarding it. I also discuss the suitability of the Convention for the promotion of Indigenous curation in museums. Of special interest is how recognition of Indigenous curation and the importance of ICH mark a shift in museological thinking and practice from a focus on objects and material culture to a focus on people and the sociocultural practices, processes, and interactions associated with their cultural expressions. Taken together these current museological trends and the Convention indicate how concerns over cultural and human rights are increasingly being addressed in museums and global public culture (see Galla 1997; Karp *et al.* 2006).

### Indigenous curation

The term 'Indigenous curation' has entered museological discourse in recent years as a way to denote non-Western models of museums, curatorial methods, and concepts of cultural heritage preservation (see Kreps 1998, 2003a, 2007; Stanley 2007). This complex of cultural expressions can be collapsed into what I refer to as 'museological behaviour' which includes the creation of structures and spaces for the collection, storage, and display of objects as well as knowledge, methods, and technologies related to their care, treatment, interpretation and conservation. Museological behaviour also encompasses concepts of cultural heritage preservation or conceptual frameworks that support the transmission of culture through time. The recognition of Indigenous curation acknowledges that while the idea of the museum as a modern, public institution dedicated to collection, preservation, display, and interpretation may be Western in origin, museological behaviour is an ancient, cross-cultural phenomenon.

Indigenous models of museums and curatorial methods may be easily recognised in some cultures. However, in others it may be necessary to look for evidence of museological behaviour embedded in larger cultural forms

and systems, such as vernacular architecture, religious beliefs and practices; social organisation and structure (especially kinship systems and ancestor worship); artistic traditions and aesthetic systems, and knowledge related to people's relationships and adaptations to their natural environment.

Indigenous models of museums may be found in vernacular architectural structures or spaces, such as Pacific Islander meeting houses or New Guinea *hau tumbuna*, which are often used to store and display sacred and ceremonial objects. They also can serve as centres for teaching younger generations about their people's history, culture, arts, and spiritual beliefs (see Mead 1983; Dundon 2007; Haata 2007; Welsch 2007). As Simpson has suggested, contemporary museums in the Pacific are not necessarily new or foreign concepts in the region, but extensions of older traditions (1996: 107).

Throughout the course of my research in Indonesia over the years, I have come across many examples of architectural forms designed for the storage and safekeeping of valuable goods and cultural materials. For example, while conducting research in villages in East Kalimantan in 1996, I observed how the Kenyan Dayak rice barn (*tumbung*) is not only a structure in which rice is stored, but also family heirlooms such as ceramic jars, gongs, drums and brassware. I also learned that certain measures are taken to preserve contents that can be seen as preventive conservation measures. For instance, rice barns are generally located outside the village on high ground to protect them from fires and the river's seasonal flooding. Certain architectural features, such as thatched roofing, movable awnings and vents, which control interior temperature and regulate airflow, function as a technologically and environmentally appropriate means of 'climate control'. Techniques for 'pest management' are also evident in the rice barns' architecture. An ingenious and effective means of preventing rodents from entering the rice barn is the placement of curved wooden planks or discs at the top of piles that support the structure. In the high heat and humidity of equatorial Borneo, mould and bacterial growth are a big problem. Villagers slow the growth of moulds by smoking peppers inside the rice barn and using charcoal as a dehumidifier. All of these preventive conservation measures are part of curatorial traditions that represent knowledge and skills dedicated to the care and protection of specially valued things.

The word curator is derived from the Latin word *curare*, which means 'to take care of'. If we think of curators as caretakers and guardians of culture, we can see how certain individuals in many societies, such as priests, ritual specialists, shamans, and elders, are curators. Indigenous curators may possess specialised knowledge on the care and treatment of certain types of objects, and are entrusted with keeping these objects safe on behalf of a community, family, or clan. This responsibility is often socially sanctioned and grounded in customs, traditions, and systems of social organisation (see Kreps 1998, 2003a, 2003b; Sullivan and Edwards 2004).

The growing awareness of Indigenous curation coincides with increased discussion within the international museum community on the place of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in museums. The discourse has been heightened since the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the *Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2003. Much of the discussion has focused on how museums can supplement their conventional tasks of curating and preserving tangible culture (objects and collections) with activities devoted to curating and preserving intangible, living cultural expressions (performing arts, skills, knowledge, and practices). If the intention is to more fully integrate ICH into museums rather than merely add it on to existing curatorial activities, greater attention needs to be given not only to what is curated, but also to how it is curated.

In this chapter, I examine how aspects of Indigenous curation are both a form of intangible cultural heritage as well as means of safeguarding it. I also discuss the suitability of the Convention for the promotion of Indigenous curation in museums. Of special interest is how recognition of Indigenous curation and the importance of ICH mark a shift in museological thinking and practice from a focus on objects and material culture to a focus on people and the sociocultural practices, processes, and interactions associated with their cultural expressions. Taken together these current museological trends and the Convention indicate how concerns over cultural and human rights are increasingly being addressed in museums and global public culture (see Galla 1997; Karp *et al.* 2006).

### Indigenous curation

The term 'Indigenous curation' has entered museological discourse in recent years as a way to denote non-Western models of museums, curatorial methods, and concepts of cultural heritage preservation (see Kreps 1998, 2003a, 2007; Stanley 2007). This complex of cultural expressions can be collapsed into what I refer to as 'museological behaviour' which includes the creation of structures and spaces for the collection, storage, and display of objects as well as knowledge, methods, and technologies related to their care, treatment, interpretation and conservation. Museological behaviour also encompasses concepts of cultural heritage preservation or conceptual frameworks that support the transmission of culture through time. The recognition of Indigenous curation acknowledges that while the idea of the museum as a modern, public institution dedicated to collection, preservation, display, and interpretation may be Western in origin, museological behaviour is an ancient, cross-cultural phenomenon.

Indigenous models of museums and curatorial methods may be easily recognised in some cultures. However, in others it may be necessary to look for evidence of museological behaviour embedded in larger cultural forms

and systems, such as vernacular architecture, religious beliefs and practices; social organisation and structure (especially kinship systems and ancestor worship); artistic traditions and aesthetic systems, and knowledge related to people's relationships and adaptations to their natural environment.

Indigenous models of museums may be found in vernacular architectural structures or spaces, such as Pacific Islander meeting houses or New Guinea *hais tumbuna*, which are often used to store and display sacred and ceremonial objects. They also can serve as centres for teaching younger generations about their people's history, culture, arts, and spiritual beliefs (see Mead 1983; Dundon 2007; Haraha 2007; Welsch 2007). As Simpson has suggested, contemporary museums in the Pacific are not necessarily new or foreign concepts in the region, but extensions of older traditions (1996: 107).

Throughout the course of my research in Indonesia over the years, I have come across many examples of architectural forms designed for the storage and safekeeping of valuable goods and cultural materials. For example, while conducting research in villages in East Kalimantan in 1996, I observed how the Kenyan Dayak rice barn (*lumbung*) is not only a structure in which rice is stored, but also family heirlooms such as ceramic jars, gongs, drums and brassware. I also learned that certain measures are taken to preserve contents that can be seen as preventive conservation measures. For instance, rice barns are generally located outside the village on high ground to protect them from fires and the river's seasonal flooding. Certain architectural features, such as thatched roofing, movable awnings and vents, which control interior temperature and regulate airflow, function as a technologically and environmentally appropriate means of 'climate control'. Techniques for 'pest management' are also evident in the rice barns' architecture. An ingenious and effective means of preventing rodents from entering the rice barn is the placement of curved wooden planks or discs at the top of piles that support the structure. In the high heat and humidity of equatorial Borneo, mould and bacterial growth are a big problem. Villagers slow the growth of moulds by smoking peppers inside the rice barn and using charcoal as a dehumidifier. All of these preventive conservation measures are part of curatorial traditions that represent knowledge and skills dedicated to the care and protection of specially valued things.

The word curator is derived from the Latin word *curare*, which means 'to take care of. If we think of curators as caretakers and guardians of culture, we can see how certain individuals in many societies, such as priests, ritual specialists, shamans, and elders, are curators. Indigenous curators may possess specialised knowledge on the care and treatment of certain types of objects, and are entrusted with keeping these objects safe on behalf of a community, family, or clan. This responsibility is often socially sanctioned and grounded in customs, traditions, and systems of social organisation (see Kreps 1998, 2003a, 2003b; Sullivan and Edwards 2004).

Indigenous curatorial methods may be intended to protect the spiritual as well as material integrity of objects. These practices reflect a particular community's religious and cultural protocols pertaining to the use, handling, and treatment of certain classes of objects. Collaboration between museums and Native American communities in the USA has illuminated how these objects are differently perceived and how they should be curated. Several museums and organisations have established guidelines and procedures for curating culturally sensitive, ceremonial and sacred objects, such as the Association of Art Museum Directors' *Report on the Stewardship and Acquisition of Sacred Objects* (2006), the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian's 'Culturally Sensitive Collections Care Program' (see Sullivan and Edwards 2004), and the Minnesota Historical Society's *Caring for American Indian Objects. A Practical Guide* (Ogden 2004). Such publications and programmes provide guidance on how to appropriately store, handle, and treat culturally sensitive and sacred items. This is because every tribe has its own methods of 'traditional care', and cultural protocol, making consultation essential to integrating Indigenous curatorial practices into museum practices. As noted in one National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) publication:

The manner in which certain objects are stored may be important to the Native community. For example, some tribes prefer certain objects to be placed according to one of the cardinal directions, others to be handled only by women or only by men, others to be fed regularly, others to be handled regularly, and so forth. (NMAI 2004: 138)

In many museums, culturally sensitive and sacred objects are separated from general collections and stored with access restricted to certain tribal members such as elders, religious leaders, 'faith keepers', and so on. In some cases, objects have been removed from sealed containers or plastic since they are spiritual entities imbued with a life force and need to breathe. Conrad House, Navajo, was dismayed to find masks stored in plastic when he visited one museum, as described in the following passage:

At the museum, I saw a number of sacred masks covered up with plastic. In our way, this is wrong. The masks have to breathe because there's energy in them – in the Navajo way, they're alive. You can't suffocate them or they'll be angry in time to come. (House 1994: 95)

The periodical smudging and feeding of objects has also become acceptable practice in some museums. The Cultural Resource Center of the NMAI has a room specifically designated for these ceremonies. Culturally sensitive and

sacred objects have also been removed from public display in exhibitions and publications in many museums (see Rosoff 1998; Flynn and Hull-Walsh 2001; Clavir 2002; Kreps 2003a; Ogden 2004; Flynn and Hull-Walsh 2004).

These practices illustrate how Native American interpretations of the meanings and values of objects stand in sharp contrast to how they are perceived and valued in museums. To most Indigenous people, objects are not just scientific specimens or works of art. They are also family heirlooms, symbols of rank and status, sacred materials necessary for the perpetuation of religious beliefs and practices, or documents of a community's history and heritage. Objects stand for significant traditions, ideas, customs, social relations, and it is the stories they tell, the performances they are a part of, and the relationships among people and between people and places that are more important than the objects themselves (see Clifford 1997 and Fienup-Riordan 2003). The process of creation and an object's function also may be more highly valued than the object (West 2004).

The above examples show how Indigenous models of museums and curatorial practices are tangible expressions of the intangible, or rather, ideas about what constitutes heritage, how it should be perceived, treated, passed on, and by whom. They exemplify holistic approaches to heritage preservation that are integrated into larger social structures and ongoing social practices. The concept of *pusaka*, common among many ethnic groups in Indonesia, is one such approach to cultural heritage that takes both tangible and intangible forms. Moreover, pusaka has worked to protect and preserve valuable cultural property and transmit cultural knowledge and traditions through the generations.

The word *pusaka* is generally translated into English as 'heirloom'. However, it takes on a wide range of meanings in the Indonesian language. Soebadio, in the book *Pusaka: Art of Indonesia* (1992) states that one Indonesian dictionary lists three separate definitions for the word *pusaka*:

- 1) something inherited from a deceased person [analogous to the English word inheritance]; 2) something that comes down from one's ancestors [analogous to heirloom]; 3) an inheritance of special value to a community that cannot be disposed of without specific common descent [analogous to heritage in the sense of something possessed as a result of one's natural situation or birth].

(1992: 15)

Tangible forms of *pusaka* include things like textiles, jewellery, ornaments, weapons, ceramics, beads, dance regalia, land, ancestor figures and houses. Intangible cultural expressions such as songs, dance dramas, stories or names can also be considered *pusaka*. Virtually anything can be regarded as *pusaka*, although not everything that is inherited is *pusaka* nor are objects created to be *pusaka*. An object or entity becomes *pusaka* in the course of its social life. As one Indonesian curator/anthropologist, Suwati Kartika, explains, *pusaka*

Indigenous curatorial methods may be intended to protect the spiritual as well as material integrity of objects. These practices reflect a particular community's religious and cultural protocols pertaining to the use, handling, and treatment of certain classes of objects. Collaboration between museums and Native American communities in the USA has illuminated how these objects are differently perceived and how they should be curated. Several museums and organisations have established guidelines and procedures for curating culturally sensitive, ceremonial and sacred objects, such as the Association of Art Museum Directors' *Report on the Stewardship and Acquisition of Sacred Objects* (2006), the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian's 'Culturally Sensitive Collections Care Program' (see Sullivan and Edwards 2004), and the Minnesota Historical Society's *Caring for American Indian Objects. A Practical Guide* (Ogden 2004). Such publications and programmes provide guidance on how to appropriately store, handle, and treat culturally sensitive and sacred items. This is because every tribe has its own methods of 'traditional care', and cultural protocol, making consultation essential to integrating Indigenous curatorial practices into museum practices. As noted in one National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) publication:

The manner in which certain objects are stored may be important to the Native community. For example, some tribes prefer certain objects to be placed according to one of the cardinal directions, others to be handled only by women or only by men, others to be fed regularly, others to be handled regularly, and so forth.

(NMAI 2004: 138)

In many museums, culturally sensitive and sacred objects are separated from general collections and stored with access restricted to certain tribal members such as elders, religious leaders, 'faith keepers', and so on. In some cases, objects have been removed from sealed containers or plastic since they are spiritual entities imbued with a life force and need to breathe. Conrad House, Navajo, was dismayed to find masks stored in plastic when he visited one museum, as described in the following passage:

At the museum, I saw a number of sacred masks covered up with plastic. In our way, this is wrong. The masks have to breathe because there's energy in them – in the Navajo way, they're alive. You can't suffocate them or they'll be angry in time to come.

(House 1994: 95)

The periodical smudging and feeding of objects has also become acceptable practice in some museums. The Cultural Resource Center of the NMAI has a room specifically designated for these ceremonies. Culturally sensitive and

sacred objects have also been removed from public display in exhibitions and publications in many museums (see Rosoff 1998; Flynn and Hull-Walski 2001; Clavir 2002; Kreps 2003a; Ogden 2004; Sullivan and Edwards 2004).

These practices illustrate how Native American interpretations of the meanings and values of objects stand in sharp contrast to how they are perceived and valued in museums. To most Indigenous people, objects are not just scientific specimens or works of art. They are also family heirlooms, symbols of rank and status, sacred materials necessary for the perpetuation of religious beliefs and practices, or documents of a community's history and heritage. Objects stand for significant traditions, ideas, customs, social relations, and it is the stories they tell, the performances they are a part of, and the relationships among people and between people and places that are more important than the objects themselves (see Clifford 1997 and Fienup-Riordan 2003). The process of creation and an object's function also may be more highly valued than the object (West 2004).

The above examples show how Indigenous models of museums and curatorial practices are tangible expressions of the intangible, or rather, ideas about what constitutes heritage, how it should be perceived, treated, passed on, and by whom. They exemplify holistic approaches to heritage preservation that are integrated into larger social structures and ongoing social practices. The concept of *pusaka*, common among many ethnic groups in Indonesia, is one such approach to cultural heritage that takes both tangible and intangible forms. Moreover, pusaka has worked to protect and preserve valuable cultural property and transmit cultural knowledge and traditions through the generations.

The word *pusaka* is generally translated into English as 'heirloom'. However, it takes on a wide range of meanings in the Indonesian language. Soebadio, in the book *Pusaka: Art of Indonesia* (1992) states that one Indonesian dictionary lists three separate definitions for the word *pusaka*:

- 1) something inherited from a deceased person [analogous to the English word inheritance]; 2) something that comes down from one's ancestors [analogous to heirloom]; 3) an inheritance of special value to a community that cannot be disposed of without specific common descent [analogous to heritage in the sense of something possessed as a result of one's natural situation or birth].

Tangible forms of pusaka include things like textiles, jewellery, ornaments, weapons, ceramics, beads, dance regalia, land, ancestor figures and houses. Intangible cultural expressions such as songs, dance dramas, stories or names can also be considered pusaka. Virtually anything can be regarded as pusaka, although not everything that is inherited is pusaka nor are objects created to be pusaka. An object or entity becomes pusaka in the course of its social life. As one Indonesian curator/anthropologist, Suwati Kartiwa, explains, pusaka

are social constructs, and it is the meaning a society gives these objects, not anything innate in the objects themselves, which makes them pusaka (1992: 159).

So, like cultural heritage in general, the meanings and values assigned to particular pusaka are socially and culturally constructed and contingent on specific contexts and circumstances. Because pusaka is a social construct, it is more appropriate to think of it in terms of social relationships because pusaka emphasises, expresses or defines relationships within a society (Marrowidikido 1992: 129).

Different cultural groups throughout Indonesia have their own categories of pusaka and ways of assigning value and meaning to it. Hence, they may have their own, particular notions of what constitutes their heritage and approaches to its preservation. They may also have their own protocol regarding who is responsible for looking after the pusaka, or its curators. In one group it may be a village headman, in another a shaman or a priest, and yet in another a member of a royal court. Curatorial work in this context is a social practice that is deeply embedded in larger social structures and processes that define relationships among people and their particular relationships to objects (Kreps 2003b).

These examples of Indonesian and Indigenous models of museums, curatorial practices and concepts of heritage demonstrate how different cultures have their own curatorial traditions and ways of preserving aspects of their culture, which, in themselves, are part of people's cultural heritage. Additionally, they illustrate how approaches to cultural heritage protection and curatorial traditions are products of specific cultural contexts, and are culturally relative and particular.

Indigenous curation is being recognised and openly embraced in some quarters, but it is still a relatively new phenomenon to many in the professional museum world. The body of literature on Indigenous curation remains relatively small given the volumes devoted to the study of Indigenous arts and artefacts. It is ironic that anthropologists, curators, art historians, and collectors have historically taken an interest in non-Western materials, but have not, until recently, turned their attention to the study of how source communities have curated these materials despite the fact that curatorial practices are also part of culture. As I have previously maintained (Kreps 2002a), this lack of attention can be attributed to an ideology that locates the invention of the museum and the development of museological practices firmly in the West. Western, scientifically based museology has been the primary context and referent for our thinking and practice. Because of the hegemony of Western museology, it is difficult for many to imagine museological behaviour expressed in alternative forms.

The hegemony of Western museology has contributed to two phenomena that have worked to undermine or erase Indigenous curatorial traditions, and paradoxically, the preservation of people's cultural heritage. The first is the

global spread and reproduction of Western-oriented museum models, the second is a reliance on expert-driven, top-down, and standardised professional museum training and development (see Kreps 2008).

Some members of the professional museum community resist the promotion and application of Indigenous curatorial methods because they believe them to be too closely tied to religious beliefs, and therefore, in conflict with the secular, scientific character of museums. Others consider Indigenous curatorial practices technologically inferior, and believe their use compromises a museum's ability to properly care for and save valuable art and artefacts. However, collaboration between Indigenous communities and museums has shown that the recognition and use of Indigenous curatorial techniques should not compromise the integrity and value of standard, professional museum practices. Instead, traditional methods can be combined with professional practices to maximise choices on how to better and most appropriately curate cultural materials. Co-curation opens channels for the exchange of information, knowledge and expertise and the development of new museological paradigms.

### Indigenous curation as intangible cultural heritage

Indigenous curatorial traditions, such as Native American approaches to the care and handling of sensitive materials discussed above, fit the definition of intangible cultural heritage because they consist of practices, knowledge systems, skills and instruments that function to transmit culture and are part of people's cultural heritage. According to the Convention, intangible cultural heritage is defined as:

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

(Article 2.1, Definitions)

The Convention also includes in its definition of ICH objects, artefacts and cultural spaces that are associated with manifestations of ICH and goes on to state:

Intangible cultural heritage is manifested in oral traditions, including language; performing arts (traditional dance, music, and theatre); social

are social constructs, and it is the meaning a society gives these objects, not anything innate in the objects themselves, which makes them pusaka (1992: 150).

So, like cultural heritage in general, the meanings and values assigned to particular pusaka are socially and culturally constructed and contingent on specific contexts and circumstances. Because pusaka is a social construct, it is more appropriate to think of it in terms of social relationships because pusaka emphasises, expresses or defines relationships within a society (Marrowidikido 1992: 129).

Different cultural groups throughout Indonesia have their own categories of pusaka and ways of assigning value and meaning to it. Hence, they may have their own, particular notions of what constitutes their heritage and approaches to its preservation. They may also have their own protocol regarding who is responsible for looking after the pusaka, or its curators. In one group it may be a village headman, in another a shaman or a priest, and yet in another a member of a royal court. Curatorial work in this context is a social practice that is deeply embedded in larger social structures and processes that define relationships among people and their particular relationships to objects (Kreps 2003b).

These examples of Indonesian and Indigenous models of museums, curatorial practices and concepts of heritage demonstrate how different cultures have their own curatorial traditions and ways of preserving aspects of their culture, which, in themselves, are part of people's cultural heritage. Additionally, they illustrate how approaches to cultural heritage protection and curatorial traditions are products of specific cultural contexts, and are culturally relative and particular.

Indigenous curation is being recognised and openly embraced in some quarters, but it is still a relatively new phenomenon to many in the professional museum world. The body of literature on Indigenous curation remains relatively small given the volumes devoted to the study of Indigenous arts and artefacts. It is ironic that anthropologists, curators, art historians, and collectors have historically taken an interest in non-Western materials, but have not, until recently, turned their attention to the study of how source communities have curated these materials despite the fact that curatorial practices are also part of culture. As I have previously maintained (Kreps 2003a), this lack of attention can be attributed to an ideology that locates the invention of the museum and the development of museological practices firmly in the West. Western, scientifically based museology has been the primary context and referent for our thinking and practice. Because of the hegemony of Western museology, it is difficult for many to imagine museological behaviour expressed in alternative forms.

The hegemony of Western museology has contributed to two phenomena

that have worked to undermine or erase Indigenous curatorial traditions, and

paradoxically, the preservation of people's cultural heritage. The first is the

global spread and reproduction of Western-oriented museum models, the second is a reliance on expert-driven, top-down, and standardised professional museum training and development (see Kreps 2008).

Some members of the professional museum community resist the promotion and application of Indigenous curatorial methods because they believe them to be too closely tied to religious beliefs, and therefore, in conflict with the secular, scientific character of museums. Others consider Indigenous curatorial practices technologically inferior, and believe their use compromises a museum's ability to properly care for and save valuable art and artefacts. However, collaboration between Indigenous communities and museums has shown that the recognition and use of Indigenous curatorial techniques should not compromise the integrity and value of standard, professional museum practices. Instead, traditional methods can be combined with professional practices to maximise choices on how to better and most appropriately curate cultural materials. Co-curation opens channels for the exchange of information, knowledge and expertise and the development of new museological paradigms.

### **Indigenous curation as intangible cultural heritage**

Indigenous curatorial traditions, such as Native American approaches to the care and handling of sensitive materials discussed above, fit the definition of intangible cultural heritage because they consist of practices, knowledge systems, skills and instruments that function to transmit culture and are part of people's cultural heritage. According to the Convention, intangible cultural heritage is defined as:

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

(Article 2.1, Definitions)

The Convention also includes in its definition of ICH objects, artefacts and cultural spaces that are associated with manifestations of ICH and goes on to state:

Intangible cultural heritage is manifested in oral traditions, including language; performing arts (traditional dance, music, and theatre); social

practices, rituals, and festive events; knowledge and practices; and traditional craftsmanship

(Article 2.2, Definitions)

As previously discussed, Indigenous curatorial traditions can be both a form of intangible cultural heritage as well as a measure for its safeguarding, for example, as seen in the Indonesian concept of pusaka and the Kenyan Dayak rice barn (lumbung). Under the Convention, 'safeguarding' means:

measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission (particularly through formal and informal education) as well as revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage.

(Article 2, 3, Definitions)

One of the primary purposes of the Convention is to raise awareness and appreciation of ICH and foster the conditions under which it can survive. Consequently, the focus is on helping sustain living cultural traditions, practices, and processes instead of just collecting and preserving cultural products. The Convention also establishes a fund for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage that can be drawn on to support such efforts. Furthermore, the Convention supports international cooperation and assistance, especially in the areas of research, documentation, education, and training (Article 21). An important requirement of the Convention is that local communities and the 'culture bearers' themselves are involved in identifying their ICH and developing and implementing measures for its safeguarding, although it also institutes 'standard-setting' objectives.

The different articles under each section of the Convention outline safeguarding measures in detail, as well as the role and responsibilities of state parties or signatories to the Convention. One of the primary means for safeguarding ICH is the creation of national inventories of ICH and lists, such as the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. Listing and lists are to play a major role in ensuring better visibility of ICH, increasing awareness of its significance, and encouraging dialogue that respects cultural diversity.

The 2003 Convention is the fifth legal instrument adopted by UNESCO over the past 30 years for the protection and safeguarding of world cultural heritage. The *Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, adopted in 1972, concentrated on identifying and protecting tangible cultural heritage, defined as monuments, architectural works, monumental sculpture and painting, archaeological sites, and natural features thought to be of outstanding universal value in the fields of history,

art and science. Thus, its focus is on protecting the products of human creativity and ingenuity predominantly of the past. It also favoured what can be seen as 'classical' works produced by 'great civilisations'. In contrast, the 2003 Convention shifts attention to safeguarding the knowledge, skills, and values behind tangible culture, concentrating on the people and social processes that sustain it. In addition to demonstrating a heightened concern for protecting living culture expressed in popular and folkloric traditions, it also acknowledges how these traditions are of value to local communities, and in particular, communities that can be characterised as marginal vis-à-vis dominant cultures, such as those of Indigenous peoples (see Kurin 2004).

### Intangible cultural heritage and museums

Since the Convention was adopted in 2003, there has been a great deal of discussion within the international museum community on the role of museums in safeguarding ICH. The International Council of Museums (ICOM), a division of UNESCO, has been a particularly strong voice in advocating ICH. Many articles on the topic have appeared in its publications, most notably, *ICOM News*, the organisation's newsletter, as well as its journal, *Museum: Intangible Cultural Heritage* was also the theme of ICOM's 2004 tri-annual conference in South Korea. In a 2003 piece in *ICOM News*, Amar Galla states that:

ICOM strongly supports UNESCO's efforts towards the safeguarding and promotion of intangible heritage, and stresses the importance of inputs from professional bodies like ICOM ... The UNESCO Convention is a significant first step in renewing our relation to cultural heritage, by promoting integrated approaches to tangible and intangible heritage.

(2003, n.p.)

It is logical that museums should play a prominent role in promoting ICH and the aims of the Convention since museums have long been devoted to curating and preserving cultural heritage, albeit mostly in tangible forms. But the curation of ICH is not an entirely new role for museums. Many museums around the world have been doing this all along, such as community-based and Indigenous museums where language and literature programmes, dance and musical performance, festivals and ceremonial gatherings take place on a regular basis (see Simpson 1996; Stanley 2007). There are also examples of museums and cultural centres where Indigenous approaches to curation have always been integral to their purpose and functions. The Makah Cultural and Resource Centre on the Makah Indian Reservation in the state of Washington, for example, is concerned with documenting and preserving Makah etiquette associated with the objects in its possession. Staff

practices, rituals, and festive events; knowledge and practices; and traditional craftsmanship

(Article 2.2, Definitions)

As previously discussed, Indigenous curatorial traditions can be both a form of intangible cultural heritage as well as a measure for its safeguarding, for example, as seen in the Indonesian concept of pusaka and the Kenyan Dayak rice barn (lumbung). Under the Convention, 'safeguarding' means:

measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission (particularly through formal and informal education) as well as revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage.

(Article 2.3, Definitions)

One of the primary purposes of the Convention is to raise awareness and appreciation of ICH and foster the conditions under which it can survive. Consequently, the focus is on helping sustain living cultural traditions, practices, and processes instead of just collecting and preserving cultural products. The Convention also establishes a fund for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage that can be drawn on to support such efforts. Furthermore, the Convention supports international cooperation and assistance, especially in the areas of research, documentation, education, and training (Article 21). An important requirement of the Convention is that local communities and the 'culture bearers' themselves are involved in identifying their ICH and developing and implementing measures for its safeguarding, although it also institutes 'standard-setting' objectives.

The different articles under each section of the Convention outline safeguarding measures in detail, as well as the role and responsibilities of state parties or signatories to the Convention. One of the primary means for safeguarding ICH is the creation of national inventories of ICH and lists, such as the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. Listing and lists are to play a major role in ensuring better visibility of ICH, increasing awareness of its significance, and encouraging dialogue that respects cultural diversity.

The 2003 Convention is the fifth legal instrument adopted by UNESCO over the past 30 years for the protection and safeguarding of world cultural heritage. The *Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, adopted in 1972, concentrated on identifying and protecting tangible cultural heritage, defined as monuments, architectural works, monumental sculpture and painting, archaeological sites, and natural features thought to be of outstanding universal value in the fields of history,

art and science. Thus, its focus is on protecting the products of human creativity and ingenuity predominantly of the past. It also favoured what can be seen as 'classical' works produced by 'great civilisations'. In contrast, the 2003 Convention shifts attention to safeguarding the knowledge, skills, and values behind tangible culture, concentrating on the people and social processes that sustain it. In addition to demonstrating a heightened concern for protecting living culture expressed in popular and folkloric traditions, it also acknowledges how these traditions are of value to local communities, and in particular, communities that can be characterised as marginal vis-à-vis dominant cultures, such as those of Indigenous peoples (see Kurin 2004).

### **Intangible cultural heritage and museums**

Since the Convention was adopted in 2003, there has been a great deal of discussion within the international museum community on the role of museums in safeguarding ICH. The International Council of Museums (ICOM), a division of UNESCO, has been a particularly strong voice in advocating ICH. Many articles on the topic have appeared in its publications, most notably, *ICOM News*, the organisation's newsletter, as well as its journal, *Museum*. Intangible Cultural Heritage was also the theme of ICOM's 2004 tri-annual conference in South Korea. In a 2003 piece in *ICOM News*, Amar Galla states that:

ICOM strongly supports UNESCO's efforts towards the safeguarding and promotion of intangible heritage, and stresses the importance of inputs from professional bodies like ICOM ... The UNESCO Convention is a significant first step in renewing our relation to cultural heritage, by promoting integrated approaches to tangible and intangible heritage. (2003, n.p.)

It is logical that museums should play a prominent role in promoting ICH and the aims of the Convention since museums have long been devoted to curating and preserving cultural heritage, albeit mostly in tangible forms. But the curation of ICH is not an entirely new role for museums. Many museums around the world have been doing this all along, such as community-based and Indigenous museums where language and literature programmes, dance and musical performance, festivals and ceremonial gatherings take place on a regular basis (see Simpson 1996; Stanley 2007). There are also examples of museums and cultural centres where Indigenous approaches to curation have always been integral to their purpose and functions. The Makah Cultural and Resource Centre on the Makah Indian Reservation in the state of Washington, for example, is concerned with documenting and preserving Makah etiquette associated with the objects in its possession. Staff

and tribal members see this as a way of preserving the sensibilities, memories, and emotions of Makah histories (Erikson *et al.* 2002: 177).

The Makah and other examples described above underscore how Indigenous curation cannot be isolated or detached from their larger cultural contexts. This ethos is beginning to take hold in mainstream museums as more and more curators are coming to realise that their job is not only to take care of objects, but also relationships between objects and people. As Richard Kurin of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC testifies:

Some anthropologists in the museum world are making the shift from curating collections of objects to curating the systems, and the people, that produce them. Anthropologists have long recognized a moral responsibility to the people with whom they work. And they long recognized that their study or curating of some small abstraction of the studied culture is dependent upon a much larger system. Rather than curate dead or captured specimens of a culture, are increasingly concerned with the living larger whole. (1997: 93)

This trend represents a turn toward the social and cultural dimensions of curatorial work. It signals how museums today are being defined more in terms of their relationships and responsibilities to people than to objects, collections, and tangible culture. In this light, museums are becoming key agents and arenas for the appreciation, promotion, and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

These trends are also in keeping with the emergence of what Eileen Hooper-Greenhill calls the 'post-museum', which counters many of the premises and practices of the 'modernist' museum born in the nineteenth century (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 152). Hooper-Greenhill contends that the post-museum will 'retain some of the characteristics of its parent, but it will re-shape them to its own ends' (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 152). Regarding the place of objects and collections in museums, she asserts that the post-museum will place more emphasis on their use rather than on accumulation and that intangible heritage will also receive greater attention (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 152).

In the post-museum, curatorial authority is shared among the museum, community members, and other stakeholders whose voices and perspectives contribute to the production of knowledge and culture in the museum through partnerships that celebrate diversity. As Hooper-Greenhill states, 'Knowledge is no longer unified and monolithic; it becomes fragmented and multivocal' and 'much of the intellectual development of the post-museum will take place outside the major European centres which witnessed the birth of the modernist museum' (2000: 153).

### The Convention and paradox of cultural heritage preservation

Like the post-museum, the *Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* can be seen as a break from modernist paradigms of cultural heritage preservation in which concepts of heritage were lodged in material things, and heritage resources were curated and managed largely by experts. In contrast, the Convention advocates sharing curatorial authority by emphasising the central role of local communities and the 'cultural bearers' themselves in safeguarding their own cultural heritage. In this sense, it recognises the cultural right of people to have greater control over and a say in how their cultural heritage is treated. Of special significance is how the Convention celebrates the cultural expressions of people who historically have been marginalised and disenfranchised, such as Indigenous and minority peoples. While these principles and guidelines can be seen as considerable advancements, the Convention's suitability for promoting Indigenous curation in museums is debatable due to the problematic nature of the safeguarding measures it recommends.

As discussed earlier, one of the main measures for safeguarding ICH proposed in the Convention is the creation of inventories and lists, such as the Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity and the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. Some question the logistics involved in creating such inventories and lists, and see their creation as a 'vast exercise in information management' (Brown 2005). Especially concerning is how the 'rescuing' mission behind the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding echoes the sentiments behind nineteenth-century 'salvage ethnography'. There are also some who believe this effort will divert limited resources from nurturing environments that enable traditional music, dance, craftsmanship, knowledge, and so forth, to survive.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006) critically examines the concept of world heritage and the instruments and measures designed to protect it. She is concerned with 'how valorization, regulation, and instrumentalization alter the relationship of cultural assets to those who are identified with them, as well as others' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 162). Ultimately, such processes create a paradoxical situation in which the diversity of cultural assets and those who produce them are subsumed under the umbrella of humanity and world heritage.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett labels Conventions and lists as well as the heritage enterprise itself as 'metacultural artifacts'. Of special interest is:

how the process of safeguarding, which includes defining, identifying, documenting and presenting cultural traditions and their practitioners, produces something metacultural. What is produced includes not only an altered relationship of practitioners to their art but also distinctive artifacts such as the list ... (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 171)

and tribal members see this as a way of preserving the sensibilities, memories, and emotions of Makah histories (Erikson *et al.* 2002: 177).

The Makah and other examples described above underscore how Indigenous curation cannot be isolated or detached from their larger cultural contexts. This ethos is beginning to take hold in mainstream museums as more and more curators are coming to realise that their job is not only to take care of objects, but also relationships between objects and people. As Richard Kurin of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC testifies:

Some anthropologists in the museum world are making the shift from curating collections of objects to curating the systems, and the people, that produce them. Anthropologists have long recognized a moral responsibility to the people with whom they work. And they long recognized that their study or curating of some small abstraction of the studied culture is dependent upon a much larger system. Rather than curate dead or captured specimens of a culture, are increasingly concerned with the living larger whole. (1997: 93)

This trend represents a turn toward the social and cultural dimensions of curatorial work. It signals how museums today are being defined more in terms of their relationships and responsibilities to people than to objects, collections, and tangible culture. In this light, museums are becoming key agents and arenas for the appreciation, promotion, and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

These trends are also in keeping with the emergence of what Eileen Hooper-Greenhill calls the 'post-museum', which counters many of the premises and practices of the 'modernist' museum born in the nineteenth century (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 152). Hooper-Greenhill contends that the post-museum will 'retain some of the characteristics of its parent, but it will re-shape them to its own ends' (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 152). Regarding the place of objects and collections in museums, she asserts that the post-museum will place more emphasis on their use rather than on accumulation and that intangible heritage will also receive greater attention (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 152).

In the post-museum, curatorial authority is shared among the museum, community members, and other stakeholders whose voices and perspectives contribute to the production of knowledge and culture in the museum through partnerships that celebrate diversity. As Hooper-Greenhill states, 'Knowledge is no longer unified and monolithic; it becomes fragmented and multivocal' and 'much of the intellectual development of the post-museum will take place outside the major European centres which witnessed the birth of the modernist museum' (2000: 153).

### The Convention and paradox of cultural heritage preservation

Like the post-museum, the *Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* can be seen as a break from modernist paradigms of cultural heritage preservation in which concepts of heritage were lodged in material things, and heritage resources were curated and managed largely by experts. In contrast, the Convention advocates sharing curatorial authority by emphasising the central role of local communities and the 'cultural bearers' themselves in safeguarding their own cultural heritage. In this sense, it recognises the cultural right of people to have greater control over and a say in how their cultural heritage is treated. Of special significance is how the Convention celebrates the cultural expressions of people who historically have been marginalised and disenfranchised, such as Indigenous and minority peoples. While these principles and guidelines can be seen as considerable advancements, the Convention's suitability for promoting Indigenous curation in museums is debatable due to the problematic nature of the safeguarding measures it recommends.

As discussed earlier, one of the main measures for safeguarding ICH proposed in the Convention is the creation of inventories and lists, such as the Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity and the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. Some question as to the logistics involved in creating such inventories and lists, and see their creation as a 'vast exercise in information management' (Brown 2005). Especially concerning is how the 'rescuing' mission behind the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding echoes the sentiments behind nineteenth-century 'salvage ethnography'. There are also some who believe this effort will divert limited resources from nurturing environments that enable traditional music, dance, artisanship, knowledge, and so forth, to survive. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006) critically examines the concept of world heritage and the instruments and measures designed to protect it. She is concerned with 'how valorization, regulation, and instrumentalization alter the relationship of cultural assets to those who are identified with them, as well as others' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 162). Ultimately, such processes create a paradoxical situation in which the diversity of cultural assets and those who produce them are subsumed under the umbrella of humanity and world heritage. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett labels Conventions and lists as well as the heritage enterprise itself as 'metacultural artifacts'. Of special interest is:

... how the process of safeguarding, which includes defining, identifying, documenting and presenting cultural traditions and their practitioners, produces something metacultural. What is produced includes not only an altered relationship of practitioners to their art but also distinctive artifacts such as the list ... (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 171)

In cases where Indigenous curatorial knowledge is in danger of being lost, documentation and archiving may be welcomed, but documentation and listing raise a number of issues and concerns. For one, this process may inadvertently undermine the integrity of Indigenous curation by isolating or detaching practices from their cultural whole and making them fit criteria outlined in the Convention. Herein lies one of the more contradictory aspects of the Convention as a mechanism for supporting Indigenous curation. One of the ultimate goals of the Convention is to protect world cultural diversity and promote diversity as a universal value, yet the methods used in the archiving and documenting process in themselves can lead to the standardisation and homogenisation of practices that are inherently varied, and governed by specific cultural protocol. The universality principle inscribed in the Convention is especially problematic because it implies that one people's cultural heritage is the heritage of humanity and is thus part of a public cultural commons. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, 'when culture becomes the heritage of humanity, the presumption is open access' (2006: 185). This premise is unacceptable to many Indigenous communities that find the public nature of museum collections and curatorial work disturbing.

For some, the concept of collecting objects to be seen, studied and cared for by outsiders is inconsistent with tribal traditions. Certain objects can only be seen, touched, or used by specific members of the community, such as men or women, elders. Parker states that 'the fact that public collections exist is a source of social problems in Indian communities' (1990: 37). Peter Jemison, Seneca, further expatiates the problem:

The concept in the white world is that everyone's culture is everyone else's. That is not really our concept. Our concept is there were certain things given to us that we have to take care of and that you are either part of it or you are not part of it. (Jemison, quoted in Parker 1990: 37)

Given these issues, listing is not a culturally appropriate measure for safeguarding Indigenous curation, nor does this strategy represent a significant departure from previous heritage preservation tactics, such as the World Heritage List that was a product of the 1972 Convention. Perhaps, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests, the value of listing and more so the Convention, rests primarily in the symbolic realm:

The list is the most visible, least costly, and most conventional way to 'do something' – something symbolic – about neglected communities and traditions. Symbolic gestures such as the list confer value on what is listed, consistent with the principle that you cannot protect what you do not value. (2006: 170)

Despite its limitations and contradictions, the Convention has stimulated an international dialogue on the role of ICH in museums, and thus, has opened avenues for the exploration of Indigenous curation as ICH on theoretical and practical levels. It has expanded the notion of what constitutes heritage and could similarly be used to broaden ideas of what constitutes 'safeguarding' as well as the measures for that safeguarding. The promotion of Indigenous curation in museums as both a form of ICH plus a means of safeguarding could liberate museums from their traditional role as custodians of tangible, static culture to stewards and curators of intangible, living, dynamic culture. In the words of Dr Nguyen Van Huy, former director of the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology:

presenting intangible cultural heritage requires the museum to develop new skills, knowledges, and methodologies; subjects of study and for presentation are no longer simply objects and artifacts, but living people and living culture. This calls for further research and capacity-building, closer relationships with local communities, and available staff and funding for these activities. (2003, n.p.)

On the one hand, the Convention contains elements of older heritage preservation models that were largely about documenting and making lists, but on the other hand, it represents a departure by placing emphasis on supporting conditions necessary for cultural reproduction. The museum is one arena in which Indigenous curatorial practices can be encouraged and kept alive, allowing for further research on such practices in addition to the creation of innovative museological approaches:

The museum itself has become a fieldsite – a place for cross-cultural encounter and creative dialogue. A more inclusive and multi-perspective approach to material in museum collections is crucial in illuminating the multiple meanings of specific objects as well as the complex processes involved in their production, collection and interpretation. Working with members of source communities provides an opportunity for developing productive relationships and collecting contemporary material for future generations. (Herle 2003: 204–5)

### Conclusion

The 2003 *Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, as opposed to earlier instruments, acknowledges that our conceptualisation of heritage, like culture in general, is an ever evolving process expressed in

In cases where Indigenous curatorial knowledge is in danger of being lost, documentation and archiving may be welcomed, but documentation and listing raise a number of issues and concerns. For one, this process may inadvertently undermine the integrity of Indigenous curation by isolating or detaching practices from their cultural whole and making them fit criteria outlined in the Convention. Herein lies one of the more contradictory aspects of the Convention as a mechanism for supporting Indigenous curation. One of the ultimate goals of the Convention is to protect world cultural diversity and promote diversity as a universal value, yet the methods used in the archiving and documenting process in themselves can lead to the standardisation and homogenisation of practices that are inherently varied, and governed by specific cultural protocol. The universality principle inscribed in the Convention is especially problematic because it implies that one people's cultural heritage is the heritage of humanity and is thus part of a public cultural commons. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, 'when culture becomes the heritage of humanity, the presumption is open access' (2006: 185). This premise is unacceptable to many Indigenous communities that find the public nature of museum collections and curatorial work disturbing. For some, the concept of collecting objects to be seen, studied and cared for by outsiders is inconsistent with tribal traditions. Certain objects can only be seen, touched, or used by specific members of the community, such as men or women, elders. Parker states that 'the fact that public collections exist is a source of social problems in Indian communities' (1990: 37).

Peter Jemison, Seneca, further explicates the problem:

The concept in the white world is that everyone's culture is everyone else's. That is not really our concept. Our concept is there were certain things given to us that we have to take care of and that you are either part of it or you are not part of it.

(Jemison, quoted in Parker 1990: 37)

Given these issues, listing is not a culturally appropriate measure for safeguarding Indigenous curation, nor does this strategy represent a significant departure from previous heritage preservation tactics, such as the World Heritage List that was a product of the 1972 Convention. Perhaps, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests, the value of listing and more so the Convention, rests primarily in the symbolic realm:

The list is the most visible, least costly, and most conventional way to 'do something' – something symbolic – about neglected communities and traditions. Symbolic gestures such as the list confer value on what is listed, consistent with the principle that you cannot protect what you do not value.

(2006: 170)

Despite its limitations and contradictions, the Convention has stimulated an international dialogue on the role of ICH in museums, and thus, has opened avenues for the exploration of Indigenous curation as ICH on theoretical and practical levels. It has expanded the notion of what constitutes heritage and could similarly be used to broaden ideas of what constitutes 'safeguarding' as well as the measures for that safeguarding. The promotion of Indigenous curation in museums as both a form of ICH plus a means of safeguarding could liberate museums from their traditional role as custodians of tangible, static culture to stewards and curators of intangible, living, dynamic culture.

In the words of Dr Nguyen Van Huy, former director of the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology:

presenting intangible cultural heritage requires the museum to develop new skills, knowledges, and methodologies; subjects of study and for presentation are no longer simply objects and artifacts, but living people and living culture. This calls for further research and capacity-building, closer relationships with local communities, and available staff and funding for these activities.

(2003, n.p.)

On the one hand, the Convention contains elements of older heritage preservation models that were largely about documenting and making lists, but on the other hand, it represents a departure by placing emphasis on supporting conditions necessary for cultural reproduction. The museum is one arena in which Indigenous curatorial practices can be encouraged and kept alive, allowing for further research on such practices in addition to the creation of innovative museological approaches:

The museum itself has become a fieldsite – a place for cross-cultural encounter and creative dialogue. A more inclusive and multi-perspectivist approach to material in museum collections is crucial in illuminating the multiple meanings of specific objects as well as the complex processes involved in their production, collection and interpretation. Working with members of source communities provides an opportunity for developing productive relationships and collecting contemporary material for future generations.

(Herle 2003: 204–5)

### Conclusion

The 2003 *Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, as opposed to earlier instruments, acknowledges that our conceptualisation of heritage, like culture in general, is an ever evolving process expressed in

multitudinous forms. The work being done today in museums with source communities is clear evidence of how museums are key sites for the promotion and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. However, it is only through sustained critical analysis and reflexive practice that our concepts of heritage can be continually revised, and safeguarding measures appropriately applied:

Cultural processes (like heritage curation) are inherently particular and particularizing, so we should not expect the application of a global policy to have the same results in all situations.

(Handler 2002: 144)

### Acknowledgements

Research for this essay was conducted while I was a Fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation funded Institute 'Theorizing Cultural Heritage' at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage during the summer of 2005. I want to thank colleagues at the center for giving me the opportunity to participate in the Institute, especially Dr Richard Kurin, Dr Peter Seitel, Dr Frank Proschak, Dr Richard Kennedy, Carla Borden and James Early. I am also grateful to Nancy Fuller of the Smithsonian Center for Museum Studies for her abiding support and guidance. This essay is a revised version of 'Indigenous Curation as Intangible Cultural Heritage: Thoughts on the Relevance of the 2003 UNESCO Convention', first published in 2005 in *Theorizing Cultural Heritage*.

### References

- Association of Art Museums Directors (2006) *Report on the Stewardship and Acquisition of Sacred Objects*, New York: New York.
- Brown, M. (2005) *Safeguarding the Intangible*. Available online at: <http://www.culturalscommons.org/comment> (Accessed 26 July 2005).
- Clavir, M. (2002) *Preserving What is Valued: Conservation and First Nations*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Clifford, J. (1997) *Routing: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Dundon, A. (2007) Moving the centre: Christianity, the longhouse, and the Gogodola Cultural Centre', in N. Stanley (ed.), *The Future of Indigenous Museums: Perspectives from the Southwest Pacific*, New York and Oxford: Bergahn Books.
- Erikson, P., Ward, H. and Wachendorf, K. (2002) *Voices of a Thousand People. The Makah Cultural Research Center*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.
- Fienup-Riordan, A. (2003) 'Yupik elders in museums; fieldwork turned on its head', in L. Peers and A. Brown (eds), *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, New York and London: Routledge.

### Curation, museums, and intangible heritage 207

- Flynn, G. and Hull-Walski, D. (2001) 'Merging traditional Indigenous curation methods with modern museum standards of care', *Museum Anthropology*, 25(1): 31–40.
- Galla, A. (1997) 'Indigenous peoples, museums, and ethics', in G. Edson (ed.), *Museum Ethics*, New York and London: Routledge.
- (2003) 'Frequently asked questions about intangible heritage', *ICOM News* (4): n.p.
- Handler, R. (2002) 'Comments on Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Culture', *Current Anthropology*, 43(1): 14.
- Hatala, S. (2007) 'The Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery as a modern basis turnuina', in N. Stanley (ed.), *The Future of Indigenous Museums: Perspectives from the Southwest Pacific*, New York and Oxford: Bergahn Books.
- Herle, A. (2003) 'Objects, agency and museums: continuing dialogues between the Torres Strait and Cambridge', in L. Peers and A. Brown (eds), *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, London: Routledge.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2000) *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, New York and London: Routledge.
- House, C. (1994) 'The art of balance', in R. West (ed.), *All roads are Good. Native Voices on Life and Culture*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian.
- Karp, I., Kratz, C.A., Szwaja, L., Ybarra-Frausto, T., Buntinx, G., Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. and Rassool, C. (eds) (2006) *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Kartika, S. (1992) 'Puaka and the Palaces of Java', in H. Soebadio (ed.), *Puaka: Art of Indonesia*, Singapore: Archipelago Press.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (2006) 'World heritage and cultural economics', in I. Karp, C.A. Kratz, L. Szwaja, T. Ybarra-Frausto, G. Buntinx, B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and C. Rassool (eds), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Kreps, C. (1998) 'Museum-making and Indigenous curation in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia', *Museum Anthropology*, 22(1): 5–17.
- (2003a) *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Cultural Heritage Preservation*, New York and London: Routledge.
- (2003b) 'Curatorship as social practice', *Curator*, 46(3): 311–23.
- (2007) 'The theoretical future of Indigenous museums', in Stanley, N. (ed.), *The Future of Indigenous Museums: Perspectives from the Southwest Pacific*, New York and Oxford: Bergahn Books.
- (2008) 'Appropriate museology in theory and practice', *International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, 23(1): 23–41.
- Kurin, R. (1997) *Reflections of a Culture Broker. A View from the Smithsonian*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- (2004) 'Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the 2003 UNESCO Convention: a critical appraisal', *Museum*, 56(1–2): 66–77.
- Marwidikrida, W. (1992) 'Heirlooms of the outer islands', in H. Soebadio (ed.), *Puaka: Art of Indonesia*, Singapore: Archipelago Press.
- Mead, S. (1983) 'Indigenous models of museums in Oceania', *Museum*, 35(3): 98–101.
- National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) (2004) 'National Museum of the American Indian: culturally sensitive collections care program and repatriation procedures', in L. Sullivan and A. Edwards (eds), *Stewards of the Sacred*, Washington, DC: American Association of Museums in cooperation with the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University.

multitudinous forms. The work being done today in museums with source communities is clear evidence of how museums are key sites for the promotion and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. However, it is only through sustained critical analysis and reflexive practice that our concepts of heritage can be continually revised, and safeguarding measures appropriately applied.

Cultural processes (like heritage curation) are inherently particular and particularizing, so we should not expect the application of a global policy to have the same results in all situations.

(Handler 2002: 144)

### Acknowledgements

Research for this essay was conducted while I was a Fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation funded Institute 'Theorizing Cultural Heritage' at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage during the summer of 2005. I want to thank colleagues at the center for giving me the opportunity to participate in the Institute, especially Dr Richard Kurin, Dr Peter Seitel, Dr Frank Proschak, Dr Richard Kennedy, Carla Borden and James Early. I am also grateful to Nancy Fuller of the Smithsonian Center for Museum Studies for her abiding support and guidance. This essay is a revised version of 'Indigenous Curation as Intangible Cultural Heritage: Thoughts on the Relevance of the 2003 UNESCO Convention', first published in 2005 in *Theorizing Cultural Heritage*.

### References

- Association of Art Museums Directors (2006) *Report on the Stewardship and Acquisition of Sacred Objects*, New York: New York.
- Brown, M. (2005) *Safeguarding the Intangible*. Available online at: <http://www.culturalscommons.org/comment> (Accessed 26 July 2005).
- Clavir, M. (2002) *Preferring What is Valued: Conservation and First Nations*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Clifford, J. (1997) *Race, Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Dundon, A. (2007) 'Moving the centre: Christianity, the longhouse, and the Gogodula Cultural Centre', in N. Stanley (ed.), *The Future of Indigenous Museums: Perspectives from the Southwest Pacific*, New York and Oxford: Bergahn Books.
- Eriksen, P., Ward, H. and Wachendorf, K. (2002) *Voices of a Thousand People. The Makah Cultural Research Center*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.
- Fienup-Riordan, A. (2003) 'Yu'pik elders in museums; fieldwork turned on its head', in L. Peers and A. Brown (eds), *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, New York and London: Routledge.
- Flynn, G. and Hull-Walski, D. (2001) 'Merging traditional Indigenous curation methods with modern museum standards of care', *Museum Anthropology*, 25(1): 31–40.
- Galla, A. (1997) 'Indigenous peoples, museums, and ethics', in G. Edson (ed.), *Museum Ethics*, New York and London: Routledge.
- (2003) 'Frequently asked questions about intangible heritage', *ICOM News* (4): n.p.
- Handler, R. (2002) 'Comments on Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Culture', *Current Anthropology*, 43(1): 144.
- Haraha, S. (2007) The Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery as a modern 'haus tumbuna', in N. Stanley (ed.), *The Future of Indigenous Museums: Perspectives from the Southwest Pacific*, New York and Oxford: Bergahn Books.
- Heide, A. (2003) 'Objects, agency and museums: continuing dialogues between the Torres Strait and Cambridge', in L. Peers and A. Brown (eds), *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, London: Routledge.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2000) *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, New York and London: Routledge.
- House, C. (1994) 'The art of balance', in R. West (ed.), *All roads are Good. Native Voices on Life and Culture*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian.
- Karp, I., Kratz, C.A., Szwaja, L., Ybarra-Frausto, T., Buntinx, G., Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. and Rassool, C. (eds) (2006) *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Kartika, S. (1992) 'Pusaka and the palaces of Java', in H. Soebadio (ed.), *Pusaka: Art of Indonesia*, Singapore: Archipelago Press.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (2006) 'World heritage and cultural economics', in L. Karp, C.A. Kratz, L. Szwaja, T. Ybarra-Frausto, G. Buntinx, B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and C. Rassool (eds), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Kreps, C. (1998) 'Museum-making and Indigenous curation in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia', *Museum Anthropology*, 22(1): 5–17.
- (2003a) *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Cultural Heritage Preservation*, New York and London: Routledge.
- (2003b) 'Curatorship as social practice', *Curator*, 46(3): 311–23.
- (2007) 'The theoretical future of Indigenous museums', in Stanley, N. (ed.), *The Future of Indigenous Museums: Perspectives from the Southwest Pacific*, New York and Oxford: Bergahn Books.
- (2008) 'Appropriate museology in theory and practice', *International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, 23(1): 23–41.
- Kurin, R. (1997) *Reflections of a Culture Broker. A View from the Smithsonian*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- (2004) 'Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the 2003 UNESCO Convention: a critical appraisal', *Museum*, 56(1–2): 66–77.
- Martowidjoko, W. (1992) 'Heirlooms of the outer islands', in H. Soebadio (ed.), *Pusaka: Art of Indonesia*, Singapore: Archipelago Press.
- Mead, S. (1983) 'Indigenous models of museums in Oceania', *Museum*, 35(3): 98–101.
- National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) (2004) 'National Museum of the American Indian: culturally sensitive collections care program and repatriation procedures', in L. Sullivan and A. Edwards (eds), *Stewards of the Sacred*, Washington, DC: American Association of Museums in cooperation with the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University.

- Nguyen, Van Huu (2003) 'Intangible cultural heritage at the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology', *ICOM News* (4): n.p.
- Ogden, S. (ed.) (2004) *Caring for American Indian Objects. A Practical and Cultural Guide*, St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society.
- Parker, P. (1990) *Keepers of the Treasure: Protecting Historic Properties and Cultural Traditions on Indian Lands*, Washington, DC: National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior.
- Peers, L. and Brown, A. (2003) *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, New York and London: Routledge.
- Rosoff, N. (1998) 'Integrating Native views into museum procedures: hope and practice at the National Museum of the American Indian', *Museum Anthropology*, 22(1): 33–42.
- Simpson, M. (1996) *Making Representation: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era*, New York: Routledge.
- Soebadio, H. (1992) 'Introduction', in H. Soebadio (ed.), *Pusaka: art of Indonesia*, Singapore: Archipelago Press.
- Stanley, N. (ed.) (2007) *The Future of Indigenous Museums. Perspectives from the Southeast Pacific*, New York: Berghahn Books.
- Sullivan, L. and Edwards, A. (eds) (2004) *Stewards of the Sacred*, Washington, DC: American Association of Museums in cooperation with the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University.
- UNESCO (2003) *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*.
- Welsch, R. (2007) 'The transformation of cultural centres in Papua New Guinea', in N. Stanley (ed.), *The Future of Indigenous Museums: Perspectives from the Southeast Pacific*, New York: Berghahn Books.
- West, R. (2004) 'The National Museum of the American Indian, Stewards of the sacred', in L. Sullivan and A. Edwards (eds), *Stewards of the Sacred*, Washington, DC: American Association of Museums in cooperation with the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University.

## Intangible cultural heritage Global awareness and local interest

Amanda Kearney

### Introduction

In this chapter, I present an overview of emerging global discourse concerning intangible cultural heritage (ICH). I posit current legislative arrangements are in their infancy and yet to engage adequately with the complexities that interface distinctions and connections between tangible and ICH and the capacity for ICH to be owned exclusively. For the vast majority of indigenous peoples, existing legal arrangements concerning their heritage remain under the control and definitional power of the state, rather than the distinct Indigenous nations that own, enact and assert these heritages in specific cultural terms.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on the United Nations *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (ICH-C) this chapter problematises aspects of current engagements with Indigenous people's ICH, identifying and critiquing the power imbalances generated by international and state-defined legislation and Conventions concerning aspects of ICH.

Recognising the political frame in which discourses of ICH have emerged and are maintained is imperative to this discussion. This reveals a discursive relationship between global trends of new environmental ethics, ecophilosophy and ecofeminism, and international interest in sustainable practices and ideologies as embodied in Indigenous or alternative knowledge systems. There is a dilemma in state control and direction over the very terms on which Indigenous knowledge systems and ICH are defined, perceived and safeguarded into the future. In line with this assertion I argue that fundamental shifts in epistemologies surrounding intangible and tangible cultural heritage must occur, highlighting the extent to which knowledge and heritage inform group and individual cultural identity, and mark cultural autonomy and distinctiveness. This chapter complicates existing discussions of ICH, while making recommendations for a shift in the discourse about such heritage. This complication can inform a range of academic discussions of tangible and intangible heritage, Indigenous knowledge systems and intellectual property.