Articulating Culturally Sensitive Knowledge Online: A Cherokee Case Study*

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Abstract: This article examines the online management of culturally sensitive knowledge through a discussion of a collaboration between the Museum of the Cherokee Indian and the Smithsonian Institution. It discusses the roles of the two institutions in a digital repatriation project involving an extensive body of 19th and 20th century manuscripts as well as the assumptions that informed their respective decisions regarding the online presentation of traditional cultural expressions. The case study explores some challenges involved in providing online access to culturally sensitive materials: first, by probing disparate senses of the term community, and then through a close examination of a particular class of heritage materials about which many Cherokee feel deeply ambivalent and for which notions of collective ownership are especially problematic. The Cherokee knowledge repatriation project offers a novel model for the circulation of digital heritage materials that may have wider applicability. The success of the project suggests that collaboration between tribal and non-tribal institutions may lead to more creative solutions for managing traditional cultural expressions than either alone can provide.

[Keywords: *Access Restrictions*, Digital Repatriation, Culturally Sensitive Materials, *Ethnographic Archiving*, *Knowledge Management*. Keywords in italics are derived from the American Folklore Society Ethnographic Thesaurus, a standard nomenclature for the ethnographic disciplines.]

Not long ago, I was giving a behind-the-scenes tour of the Smithsonian's National Anthropological Archives when a member of the group asked me how our archives deals with culturally sensitive collections. Coincidentally, we were standing in front of a recent acquisition: the papers of Frederica de Laguna (1906-2004), an eminent anthropologist who conducted research among the Tlingit people of the Pacific Northwest Coast between 1949 and 1954. De Laguna and I had spent an inordinate amount of time discussing the final disposition of her fieldnotes, which she wanted to restrict from the public for 50 years. For my part, as an archivist working for an institution that promotes open access to its collections, I was intent on making her papers available sooner. De Laguna eventually agreed to a shorter restriction, but she was still unhappy. What troubled her conscience wasn't the duration of the restriction, she explained, but the content of her fieldnotes, which included detailed accounts of witchcraft accusation in the Tlingit community (Wang 2006). In de Laguna's view, protecting the reputation of the individuals accused of witchcraft whose names appeared in her fieldnotes meant that we should

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seal them until everyone mentioned in them was long dead, or perhaps longer. After much soul-searching and negotiation, she and I devised a solution that I shared with my visitors: We would photocopy her original fieldnotes and redact the names of accused witches on a duplicate copy that we would provide to researchers, thereby allowing us to make the lion's share of her field materials publicly accessible. I was sort of proud of my success.

At this point in my narrative, a student in the group spoke up: "I'm Tlingit," she said. "Do you really think we don't know if someone's a witch?"

In making decisions about how to share culturally sensitive collections, archivists seek guidance from a variety of sources, including anthropologists with intimate knowledge of the people they work with and, of course, those people themselves. We're well-intentioned and responsive to the interests of everyone we serve, but I sometimes wonder whether we're effective. After ten years as an archivist and five additional years as the director of two anthropological archives, I've come to the conclusion that our decisions regarding public access are often ill-considered. For despite our collective professional experience and best intentions, archivists occasionally provide access to collections that community members would prefer to restrict and occasionally *restrict* access to collections that community members would prefer to have open.[1] All of these access decisions, of course, influence our subsequent decisions concerning what we place online or repatriate to source communities as digital surrogates.

I'm not suggesting that archivists exercise poor judgment. Rather, I think we've carried forward a set of professional principles and values that are inadequate for managing cultural heritage materials, particularly in an online environment. As a consequence, we've rushed headlong into digital repatriation projects without acknowledging a variety of factors that affect their outcome (all of which would benefit from ethnographic study themselves). Donor restrictions are one of the most significant of these factors because they impede access to collections from the start (Leopold 2006, 2008), but other factors are equally important. We also need to scrutinize the criteria we use for determining what we digitize and place online because our selection criteria ultimately valorize those materials and naturalize the results of our decisions.[2] How do we articulate our rationale for the gaps and silences that result when we choose not to display certain collection materials online in deference to the cultural sensitivities of the communities of origin that we serve? How do we ascribe responsibility for our interventions? And most importantly, how might we evaluate our success?

In this article, I examine the online management of culturally sensitive knowledge through a discussion of a collaboration between the Museum of the Cherokee Indian and the Smithsonian Institution.[3] I discuss the roles of the two institutions in a digital repatriation project involving an extensive body of 19th- and 20th-century Cherokee manuscripts. I also consider the assumptions that informed our respective decisions regarding the online presentation of traditional cultural expressions known as *idi:gawé:sdi* ("things said") or, more commonly, sacred formulas or medicine. My case study explores some challenges involved in providing online access to culturally sensitive materials: first, by probing disparate senses of the term *community*, and then through a close examination of a particular class of heritage materials about which many Cherokee feel deeply ambivalent and for which notions of collective ownership are especially problematic. Although the Cherokee knowledge repatriation project is atypical in many ways, it offers a novel model for the circulation of digital heritage materials that may have wider

applicability. The success of the Cherokee project also suggests that collaboration between tribal and non-tribal institutions may lead to more creative solutions for managing traditional cultural expressions than either alone can provide.

The Source Archive

The National Anthropological Archives (NAA) collects and preserves historical and contemporary anthropological materials that document the world's cultures and the history of anthropology. All told, its holdings include more than 10,000 linear feet of ethnographic fieldnotes, journals, and unpublished manuscripts as well as an enormous collection of linguistic materials: vocabularies, grammars, myths, legends, and other narratives from several hundred spoken and silent languages from around the world, but mainly from Native North America. Stacked on end, the shelves that hold these collections would match the height of the Washington Monument 18 times. The NAA also holds approximately one million photographs (including some of the earliest images of Indigenous people worldwide); 21,000 works of Indigenous art; some 11,400 sound recordings; as well as eight million feet of original ethnographic film and video. The Smithsonian Institution's broad collection policy and its support of anthropological research for more than 150 years have made the NAA an unparalleled resource for scholars interested in the cultures of North America, Latin America, Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Europe, as well as for Native peoples researching their own cultural heritage.[4]

Over the past 12 years or so, the NAA has produced about 120,000 digital surrogates of manuscripts, photographs, and artwork, of which more than 75 percent appear online. On any given year, these digital images are viewed eight-to-ten million times.[5] Clearly, there is enormous interest in ethnographic materials, just as there is considerable interest from anthropologists, source communities, and funding agencies in making an even greater volume of them available online. But digitization is an unfunded mandate. Even in an institution as large as mine, the digitization of ethnographic fieldnotes and other research products is essentially a consumer-driven activity. For although the NAA occasionally digitizes items in response to one-off requests from publishers and researchers, Native communities fund most large-scale digitization initiatives themselves via competitive award programs such as Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL), a joint venture of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the National Science Foundation. Over the past seven years, the DEL program has indirectly funded the digitization of more than 22,000 pages of linguistic and ethnographic manuscripts in our archives.

One important consequence of these funding opportunities is that the selection criteria used for the creation of digital surrogates are also consumer-driven, an unorthodox (though not necessarily uncommon) archival practice. In an ideal world, an institution such as mine would digitize collections based on such criteria as their intrinsic value, potential use, physical condition, associated intellectual property rights, and occasionally, a collection’s potential to generate revenue (Ooghe and Moreels 2009). In practice, however, we’ve shifted responsibility for selection to those with the means to pay. That’s not necessarily a bad thing. On the upside, it helps to assure that the materials we digitize are actually of interest to someone. On the downside, this practice creates a situation in which the corpus of available materials online falls

somewhere along a continuum that ranges from everything-about-a-subject to what-someone-paid-to-scan. Arguably, that's better than nothing, and when you work in an institution with 137 million objects, you're grateful for all the help you can get. Yet, if I told you that the Smithsonian was digitizing only Civil War diaries written by men because no one had funded the digitization of women's diaries and that, consequently, our online collections were preparing children to complete homework assignments that reflected the lives of 19th-century men and obscured the lives of women and that the subsequent gaps and silences would forever seem natural to them, I would hope you'd be alarmed.[6]

Source communities certainly have a legitimate interest in determining the nature of the heritage materials that circulate among them, online and off, and obviously Tlingit witchcraft accusations and Civil War diaries are not the same thing. At the same time, anthropologists and archivists know that the communities we live in or work with are seldom of one mind about how heritage collections should circulate after their return (O'Meara and Good 2010; Ross et al. 2006; Turin 2011) or regarding who speaks for them (Forsyth 2012; Holton 2009:168-170). And yet these legitimate interests and disparate voices are precisely what granting institutions, archives, and community gatekeepers fundamentally ignore when planning and funding digital repatriation projects. Despite our collective understanding of this diversity, we share a troubling disregard for the varied audiences of our collections, many of whom, in an online environment, will forever remain unknown to us. One reason this happens is because cultural heritage institutions generally make digitization arrangements with community gatekeepers who serve in a dual capacity: on the front end through grant-writing activities that determine the range of materials that will be digitized (the selection criteria) and on the back end when their home institutions decide how repatriated digital collections will circulate after the return, whether such decisions are collectively determined or not.

In addition to this diversity of opinion and preference, it's also clear that digital repatriation initiatives rarely consider how diaspora communities and tribal members off the reservation will gain access to digitized collections after their repatriation to home communities (it's no secret that digital images often live on hard drives in someone's office). Likewise, our digital repatriation projects rarely acknowledge the indeterminate relationship between heritage communities and speaker communities (Evans 2001) or the still more complicated relationship between heritage communities and *non*-speaker communities (Conathan and Garrett 2009). But I believe some of the issues involved in identifying the relationship between community and online circulation are beginning to be addressed.

In a thoughtful discussion of online access to linguistic resources, Carolyn O'Meara and Jeff Good (2010) attempt to tease out the features that distinguish *community* in an online environment: "Before digital technologies made the copying and dissemination of language materials relatively trivial," they suggest,

> precisely delineating who belonged to a given community using operationalizable criteria would have been helpful, but not necessarily essential. The *technological* barriers to access of materials produced a *social* setting conducive to ad hoc case-by-case decisions. However, if we want to realize the promise of digital technologies for allowing individuals to easily access materials which they have a legitimate interest in, the process of determining who is a community member

> needs to be at least somewhat depersonalized. A digital language archive, in particular, will not be in a position to create an appropriate definition of "community" for all of the communities represented in its materials. Rather, its job is merely to enforce access restrictions, requiring that the groups to which those restrictions pertain must already be well-defined. [2010:166]

Archivists may disagree with O'Meara and Good's assertion that community membership can be defined in an ad-hoc manner in bricks-and-mortar archives or that defining tribal membership in such cases is less than essential, but their larger point is worth considering more closely. This is their suggestion that online repositories must define user communities in a *depersonalized* way (meaning someone simply is or isn't a community member) in order to facilitate access to their collections. Their point is consequential because a corollary would seem to be that providing online access is unproblematic once the universe of community members, however defined, is known.[7] I disagree. My own experience suggests that digital heritage collections may fall under even greater scrutiny after their return to source communities precisely *because* the identity of prospective users is known, and that rather than facilitating access, one's personal identity may occasionally provide an obstacle to circulation. I recently had an opportunity to discuss these issues with colleagues at the Museum of the Cherokee Indian and with community members involved in Cherokee endangered-language initiatives, whose knowledge repatriation project provides a dramatic example.

The Source Community

In June 2005, the NEH awarded the Museum of the Cherokee Indian a DEL grant to digitize a collection of ethnographic and linguistic manuscripts in the National Anthropological Archives, one of the most important repositories of materials relating to Cherokee culture, language, and history in the world. The collection includes scores of manuscripts written in the Cherokee syllabary invented by Sequoyah in 1821, including the still largely-unpublished writings by Swimmer, Inali, and other Cherokee individuals. In addition, the NAA collection includes ethnographic accounts of Cherokee culture written by James Mooney (1861–1921) of the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology, whose association with the Cherokee began in 1887; and by Belgian anthropologist Frans Olbrechts (1899–1958), who wrote about Cherokee language and medicine in the 1920s and early 1930s.[8] The DEL grant to the Museum of the Cherokee Indian enabled the NAA to produce more than 9,100 high-resolution digital surrogates of these manuscripts between 2005 and 2008.

In November 2011, I visited the Museum of the Cherokee Indian in Cherokee, North Carolina, to speak with museum staff involved in the digital repatriation project as well as with a former museum archivist (now a tribal council member) and several additional community members including teachers and translators involved in language revitalization efforts. Everyone I spoke with mentioned how the digitization project was contributing to their language revitalization initiative, a key concern in a community where most fluent Cherokee speakers are middle-aged or older.[9] Cherokee language translators told me that the NAA manuscripts include words and phrases that they hadn't heard in decades. Dr. Barbara R. Duncan, the Cherokee museum's director of education, estimates that around 30 percent of the vocabulary in the Smithsonian manuscripts is no longer in current usage or is just unknown (personal communication with the

author, November 23, 2011). In addition to their linguistic value, the NAA manuscripts include stories, traditional dance songs and musical transcriptions, early maps and censuses, medical formulas, and several volumes of correspondence including letters written by Cherokee serving as Confederate soldiers during the Civil War. The Cherokee manuscripts are also a rich source of environmental and ethnobotanical knowledge concerning the Qualla Boundary region (Cozzo 2004), for as one community member told me, "Nobody knows 500 plants anymore."[10] No less significantly, people I spoke with remarked about the intangible benefits of the digitization project, such as "just having the manuscripts there, just being able to touch and connect with them."

As the project was originally conceived, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian intended to make high-resolution versions of these manuscripts available to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians through an online public access system housed in the building. Museum staff also intended to carry out fieldwork with elders and Native speakers in order to assess the materials, translate them, and develop ways to use them in Cherokee language preservation programs. In addition, NAA staff planned to mount portions of the collection in SIRIS, the Smithsonian's online public access catalog. At the start of the project, representatives of both institutions also discussed our mutual interest in suppressing the display of culturally sensitive materials in our respective online public access catalogs; but a different approach unfolded as the project developed.

Cherokee Sacred Formulas

A significant portion of the collections that the National Anthropological Archives digitized for the Museum of the Cherokee Indian consists of traditional cultural expressions known as *idi:gawé:sdi* ("things said") or, more commonly, as formulas or medicine (Figure 1). Mooney collected between 550 and 600 "sacred formulas" from Cherokee medicine men on the Qualla Boundary in 1887 and 1888 (King 1982).[11] In Mooney's words, the formulas address

> every subject pertaining to the daily life and thought of the Indian, including medicine, love, hunting, fishing, war, self-protection, destruction of enemies, witchcraft, the crops, the council, the ball play, etc., and, in fact, embodying almost the whole of the ancient religion of the Cherokees. The original manuscripts, now in the possession of the Bureau of Ethnology, were written by the shamans of the tribe, for their own use, in the Cherokee characters invented by Sikwâ´ya (Sequoyah) in 1821, and were obtained, with the explanations, either from the writers themselves or from their surviving relatives. [1891:307]

Cherokee medicine men transmitted formulas to their apprentices over time (Fogelson 1975:124), but written formulas were also inherited, traded, and sold.[12] Raymond D. Fogelson proposes that putting a formula to paper "imbued it with tangibility and an aura of sanctity that insured a fairly literal transmission of the knowledge contained within these texts" (1975:114). However, it's clear that these written texts occasionally concealed as much as they revealed. Margaret Bender writes,

> Although these texts were generally intended as very precise records of received oral formulas, and thus were not spontaneously generated by individuals, each

> contained information that was potentially the unique property of the individual. Therefore, it was held to be very important that others did not fully crack the user's particular syllabary code. Handwriting in such texts, therefore, was … as unique and unreadable as the author could make it. [2002:93]

A common Cherokee belief was that "the system should encode accurately and completely and should possess the ability to obfuscate" (Bender 2002:161; see also Fogelson 1961:217; Mooney and Olbrechts 1932:104).

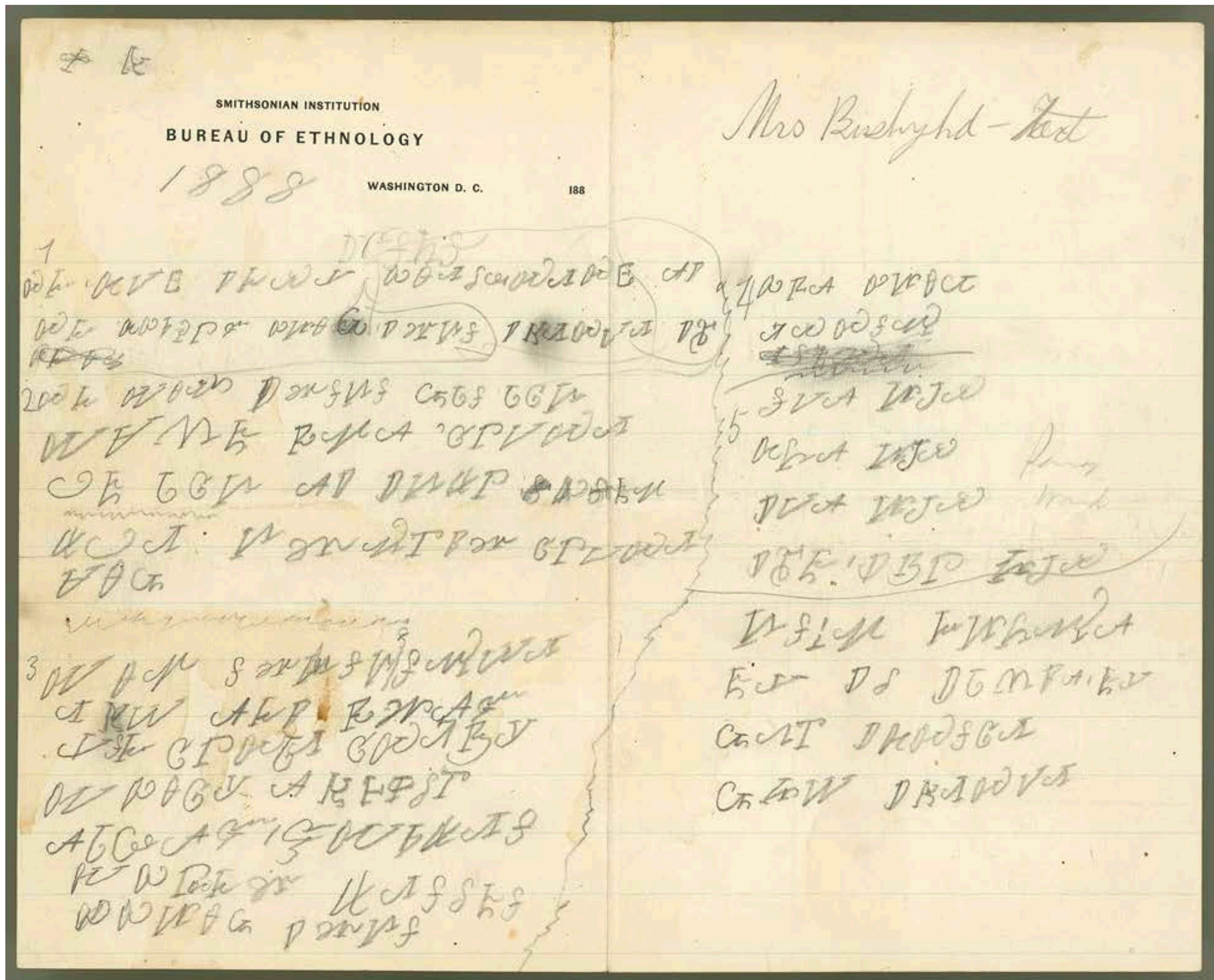

Figure 1. Medical formula from Mrs. Bushyhead 1888, collected by James Mooney. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Ms. 4660.

Besides their use of idiosyncratic orthography, Cherokee medicine men occasionally camouflaged a formula's purpose by providing a euphemistic or misleading title, particularly if the formula's intent was antisocial (Kilpatrick and Kilpatrick 1970:97; Mooney and Olbrechts 1932:154, 158). Fogelson notes that the formulas also contain "unintelligible archaic expressions, many of which were encountered by Mooney as early as 1887" (1961:217, citing Mooney 1891:309). According to Alan Kilpatrick,

> The main difficulty in translating the idi:gawé:sdi results from the fact that Cherokee traditionalists invariably employ a highly specialized vocabulary to codify their spells, one that is replete with ritualisms, archaisms, loan words, and unusual verb forms. As a result, [the formulas] can bear as little resemblance to ordinary Cherokee discourse as Chaucer's Old English does to the writings of James Joyce. [1997:25]

At the start of the project, I knew nothing about Cherokee formulas, and Duncan, the Cherokee museum's project director, for her part, could not have known how extensively the formulas were represented in our collections, given that the collections include unidentified and inaccurately catalogued materials.[13] Would the NAA have offered to digitize an extensive volume of manuscripts written in an archaic syllabary that virtually no one today can read? Would we have offered to withhold from online display a class of materials whose meaning is puzzling to Cherokee themselves? Our arrangement with the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, like the arrangement we made earlier with de Laguna, was a good-faith effort to respect the cultural sensitivities of a community that we didn't know very well and to limit the circulation of heritage materials whose cultural nuances we didn't understand. Exploring these options more fully at the start of the digitization project with a range of participants from the archival, academic, and Cherokee communities would have been invaluable. Instead, the discussion didn't really unfold until digital surrogates of these collections began their return to the Cherokee community.

After the Return: The Circulation of Indigenous Knowledge

Although the Cherokee museum's NEH grant proposal suggests that its knowledge repatriation project would help bridge a circulation divide, the local community was perhaps even more divided after the manuscripts were returned. In June 2006, a year after the museum had received the grant, a specially convened meeting of the Elders Council of the tribe's Cultural Resources Department was held. At this time, the NAA had digitized about 6,000 manuscript pages. According to Duncan's written summary of the discussion (appended to an Annual Performance Report submitted to NEH), council members held two positions regarding the disposition of the manuscripts:

> The first is that they do not want researchers investigating Cherokee spiritual traditions, loosely termed "medicine." This is a policy of the committee in the Cultural Resources Office of the Eastern Band that approves research requests, as well as the consensus of the elders. The second is that, if material has already been published and is known to the public, then it is all right to publish it and refer to it. [2006a]

Duncan adds, "The material held at NAA does not necessarily all fall in this category" because in "the Cherokee way of thinking, much of this material remains unpublished and should remain so, even if it is publicly held" (2006a).

The elders who spoke at the meeting reported by Duncan and the individuals with whom I spoke five years later voiced identical reasons for restricting access to the formulas:

- The formulas should not be translated or published because they should not be handled in that way.
- Making the formulas public diminishes their power and makes this part of Cherokee tradition useless, because when more people … know about these, their power becomes diluted.
- Only certain Cherokee people are considered qualified, by the consensus of the elders, to have access to certain knowledge. They should have a clear mind and lead a good life before being allowed to obtain certain kinds of information. Making this information public ignores this aspect of the tradition.
- Some of the formulas have already been altered as they were written down, so they could not be used by anyone but the original owner of them. Using them in this incorrect form could lead to harmful results, or no results.[14]
- The formulas cannot be effectively used unless you're initiated by a medicine person into the tradition.
- People still use these for medicine and conjuring, and this living tradition should be respected. [Duncan 2006a:1–2]

These perspectives informed the Cherokee museum's public access policy. In deference to the elders, the Tribal Council, and the Cherokee Language Consortium, the museum resolved to make approximately 2,500 pages of non-culturally sensitive collections accessible through PastPerfect-Online (the museum's online collections management system) and make the remaining 6,600 pages of culturally sensitive collections available on-site to individuals who specifically request them. Restricting access to culturally sensitive collections in this way was intended to limit the universe of prospective users to a well-defined community: enrolled members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Enrolled Cherokee who access these digital collections on-site have *unqualified* access to a corpus of materials whose use would traditionally have been qualified by such personal attributes as "having a good heart," "being slow to anger," knowledge of the Cherokee language and literacy, and having been selected as a medicine man.

The museum's collections management system also did something quite novel: Online catalog records for the culturally sensitive digital collections that may only be viewed at the museum included hyperlinks to corresponding catalog records in SIRIS, the Smithsonian's online catalog.[15] Researchers who navigated these links to the Smithsonian's online catalog gained access to digital surrogates of collections that the Museum of the Cherokee Indian chose not to display within its own online catalog: documents relating to conjuring and spells for which the only cultural protocol, apparently, is simply not to view them. The Cherokee museum's online catalog thus provided a window through which community members could view potentially malevolent materials without the social stigma that would accompany their access and use in person. As one community member explained: "It would be considered a bad thing in this community for someone to say that they were actually interested in the formulas, to express any interest in them. It would mean that they were interested in conjuring.… And in this group of elders, it's practically an impossibility that anyone would say, 'Well I think these are important materials and people should have access to them,' because then the implication is that, what are you going to do with them?" (anonymous personal communication, November 2011).[16]

Conclusion: Articulating Knowledge

This article has examined one Cherokee community's relationship to its online archive of digitized manuscripts and a class of troublesome heritage materials, sacred formulas, that defy easy management. I've described how the Museum of the Cherokee Indian addressed a delicate collection access issue by joining two otherwise independent online public access catalogs to steward disparate forms of cultural knowledge. The Cherokee model is multi-sited and elastic, in contrast to more familiar online access models such as: (1) the graded access model at the Archives of Indigenous Languages of Latin America, where registered users are permitted access as depositors, Indigenous users, or another rights category (Johnson 2003); (2) participatory content management systems such as Mukurtu CMS that define "sharing protocols" for Indigenous cultural materials by mapping the personal and social identities of individual users (Christen 2011:198–207; Hunter et al. 2003); and (3) the binary, all-or-nothing approaches that provide access exclusively to community members, such as those championed by O'Meara and Good (2010), discussed earlier in this essay.

The access model that the Cherokee museum devised was unanticipated. Although the NAA had offered to restrict access to culturally sensitive collections at the start of the project, it never received a request from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to do so.[17] Accordingly, collections that the NAA had intended to remove from online display remain available. And although the Museum of the Cherokee Indian had originally intended to make most of its digital collections available online through its collections management system, subject to local community control, the museum ultimately pointed researchers interested in culturally sensitive materials to a remote online catalog where, counterintuitively, access is provided universally, anonymously, and without mediation. The Cherokee example gives point to Haidy Geismar and William Mohns's observation, "The digitized museum may reflect the collections of its predecessor, but it is no longer curated or contained in the same manner" (2011:S135).

The Cherokee museum's access model addresses some intractable issues but doesn't completely resolve them. In deference to the Elders Council, the museum chose to limit access to culturally sensitive digital collections to enrolled members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and to proscribe access to individuals who are perhaps most served by the museum: the tourist and Cherokee-enthusiast public. However, since the museum's public access policy is unwritten, an open question is how the museum will accommodate prospective *on-site* research use of its collections by enrolled members of the Cherokee Nation and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians (the other federally recognized Cherokee tribes) and members of non-federally recognized Cherokee bands that state governments recognize (Barbara R. Duncan, personal communication, June 27, 2012). A further question is how the museum will accommodate non-enrolled Cherokee language speakers whose quasi-membership in the community was aptly summarized by an elder in the community, "If you can read the Bible in Cherokee, you're Cherokee; it doesn't matter if you have an enrollment card."[18] With 819,105 individuals claiming Cherokee identity on the 2010 U.S. Census (Crow 2012) (more than twice the combined membership of all federally recognized Cherokee tribes) and with a host of actively engaged Cherokee-language learners from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, the boundary of the Cherokee community of interest is anything but fixed.[19]

Not surprisingly, Cherokee hold a variety of opinions about the power and efficacy of the formulas as well as about the appropriate cultural protocol for managing access to them. As one individual involved in the project confided:

> It's kind of been a struggle with our [digital] materials. … What the Tribal Council previously wanted to do with our materials is to bury them. … One of the elders groups said, "We don't want this material to be used, because it's culturally sensitive or spiritually sensitive." And as a Cherokee, you know, I don't feel like anyone should be able to dictate the stuff I can use that belongs to me as a person that belongs to that culture: that's as much a part of me as anybody. So that's the thing: People have a close-mindedness about sharing our materials.

Another individual, who endorsed the non-disclosure of the formulas out of respect for the elders, nonetheless felt that community members should be able to read what their ancestors had written. Referring to traditional criteria for controlling access to the formulas, a middle-aged descendant of Will West Long (1870–1947), an Eastern Cherokee scribe, interpreter, and translator for James Mooney and others, said: "So there were those qualifications. But nowadays, because we've lost so much of our traditional beliefs, or just haven't been practicing them …, it's not a matter that I'm going to practice medicine, but for me it's curiosity, to see what Will West wrote, to see his writings and how he thought" (see also Caplan 2010:16). Still others expressed concern that making the manuscripts available online might reduce their efficacy. As T. J. Holland, cultural resources supervisor of the Eastern Band, explains, "The digitization of the Medicine Formulae is a great step forward in preserving the information contained in those texts, but there is a concern regarding access to this material by the general public. Our main concern is that when such material is made public the viability of the material is harmed" (personal communication, June 4, 2012). Most Cherokee, of course, are simply unaware that the manuscripts are available in digital format at either institution.

The digital repatriation of collections to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has occasioned feelings of cultural pride as well as some anxiety. While the Museum of the Cherokee Indian has successfully repatriated tens of thousands of digital surrogates from the Smithsonian and other far-flung repositories to a tribal institution in the local community, where museum staff have carefully cataloged and controlled them, the formulas themselves are less easily managed. In conversations with me, Eastern Band individuals described written formulas inherited from ancestors that remain tucked away in locked trunks, heirlooms that simultaneously invoke feelings of pride, awe, curiosity, and unease.[20] Formulas maintained in public archives also have the capacity to invoke these feelings. Their vitality is such that, after viewing a collection of formulas at the American Philosophical Society, staff of the Eastern Band's Cultural Resources Office had to cleanse themselves of the things they saw and touched (Holland, personal communication, June 29, 2012). Others will not approach such materials at all.

Digitizing the Smithsonian's archival collections was relatively effortless. Repatriating digital surrogates to the source community and developing acceptable access protocols for them was challenging. Animating the cultural knowledge contained in these manuscripts, however, will require literacy in the Cherokee language as well as a profound commitment to engage with them. The digital return of collections to source communities is always just a beginning.

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Notes

1. Sjaak Van der Geest (2003) discusses a parallel ethical issue in scholarly publication: the anthropological community's insistence on conferring anonymity on the subjects of ethnographic inquiry despite the subjects' occasional disinterest in it.

2. While my focus is online access, the archivist's active role in creating the historical record actually begins earlier, when manuscripts, photographs, and other records are initially appraised for retention; see Cook 2011 and Duranti 1994. For perspectives on archival appraisal in relation to Native, Indigenous, and marginalized groups, see Harris 2002:84-86 and Schwartz and Cook 2002. For an excellent summary of recent discussions about "archival silences" in online collections made available through digital humanities projects, see Theimer 2012.

3. The Museum of the Cherokee Indian is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that represents the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), a federally recognized tribe living on the Qualla Boundary in the mountains of western North Carolina. The EBCI appoints five of the museum's 15 board members. The principal chief and the chair of tribal council are ex-officio members of the museum board. The museum is a component of the tribe to the extent that it shares employee benefit programs. The Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum complex, is an independent trust instrumentality of the United States. The Board of Regents is the governing body and consists of members of Congress and private citizens of the United States.

4. For an overview of the NAA, see Schmidt 2008. Skrydstrup (2006) compares the NAA's policies for culturally sensitive materials with those of other archival repositories.

5. This figure is based on the Smithsonian's monthly Web-server logs.

6. See also Margaret Hedstrom:

> If remote access becomes the predominate way in which most users discover archives and interact with their contents, then the on-line collection becomes *the* collection for many users. … Taken too far, this strategy can produce superficial digital collections, removed from their original provenance and context, that reinforce dominant master narrative of progress, nationalism, ethnic superiority, patriarchy, technological determinism, or whatever those making decisions about what to digitize decide to emphasize. [2002:40–41]

An apt illustration of Hedstrom's point is the online presentation of two of the largest digital archives related to Cherokee history at the University of Georgia: the *Cherokee Phoenix* newspaper (1828–34) and the *Southeastern Native American Documents* (1730–1842): "Because the materials are limited to the pre-removal period, the archives inadvertently reinforce the Myth of the Vanishing Indian or the idea that the Cherokee 'disappeared' from Georgia in 1838" (Powell 2005:80).

7. This line of reasoning also homogenizes Indigenous community members entrusted with divergent modes of knowledge by virtue of their relative age, gender, place of birth, clan membership, and assumed or inherited ritual statuses (among other possibilities); see, for example Anderson 2006; Christen 2011; and Hunter et al. 2003.

8. For an overview of Mooney's fieldwork among the Cherokee, see Duncan 2006b; King 1982; and Moses 2002. Olbrechts' Cherokee research is discussed in Herskovits 1958.

9. A 2005 survey funded by the Cherokee Preservation Foundation disclosed that there were 460 fluent speakers living in Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian communities, 72 percent of whom were older than 50 (Cherokee Preservation Foundation 2012). More than 50 years ago, Raymond Fogelson estimated a 10 percent Cherokee literacy rate (1961:218).

10. Cherokee herbalists probably had this range of knowledge. R. Alfred Vick's compilation and analysis (2011) of four published surveys of Cherokee ethnobotany found more than 739 plant species used for medicine, food, fiber, dye, and other uses. Of these, 483 plant species appear in more than one published source (2011:397).

11. I use the term *medicine man* as a gloss for men and women who are referred to in the ethnographic literature alternatively as priests, shamans, herbalists, diviners, conjurors, witches, and sorcerers, depending upon the focus of their training and the beneficial or malevolent intent of their practices.

12. Mooney (1891:210-318) provided a lengthy account of his methods for obtaining formulas; see also Moses (2002:24).

13. Early linguistic collections deposited in the Archives of the Bureau of American Ethnology (the NAA's predecessor) were particularly prone to misidentification, and Cherokee manuscripts written in the syllabary are still among the most difficult to identify. The NAA, like most archival repositories, operates with a miniscule staff and virtually no budget for cataloging.

14. Cf. Kilpatrick and Kilpatrick: "The texts under consideration here are, from the Cherokee viewpoint, 'dead'; of no effect. Their power passed with their owner. Unfortunately, the full knowledge of how he implemented them was also lost" (1970:85).

15. The hyperlinks that bridged the two online collection catalogs disappeared sometime between November 2011 and January 2012 due to a technical issue with the museum's website as well as a misunderstanding about the propriety of linking to the Smithsonian's online catalog. I understand that the hyperlinks will be reestablished when the Museum of the Cherokee Indian's new website goes online (Barbara R. Duncan, personal communication, June 25, 2012).

16. Similarly, Margaret Bender describes the case of a young man under 30 years of age whose interest in learning to read the Cherokee syllabary prompted townspeople to accuse him of witchcraft: “Someone had made a statement to one of my relatives that someone’s training him, or someone’s teaching him, because they said that there’s no other reason why a person should know that at a young age” (2002:104–105).

17. The Smithsonian’s *Digital Asset Access and Use* policy, developed during the course of the Cherokee project, provides guidance on collections that may be withheld from the public. “*Sensitive Content* is defined in different ways by members of individual communities, nations, tribes, ethnic groups, and religious denominations, but usually includes materials that relate to traditional knowledge and practices. Such materials may a) be considered the private domain of specific individuals, clans, cults or societies; b) require an appropriate level of knowledge to view and understand; c) threaten the privacy and well-being of a community when exposed or disclosed to outsiders; and/or d) give offense if inappropriately used or displayed, or when appropriated or exploited for commercial purposes.” (Smithsonian Institution 2011:18.)

18. While the Cherokee language literacy rate is extremely low, use of the Cherokee syllabary is nonetheless growing judging by the enthusiastic response to the release of the Cherokee font and keyboard on multiple OS platforms as well as the introduction of Gmail in Cherokee; see Cornelius 2012.

19. Circe Sturm (2002, 2011) explores the contested nature of Cherokee community and identity. Emma Waterton and Laurajane Smith (2010) discuss the nostalgic, uncritical assumption of community homogeneity in heritage sector discourse more generally.

20. Bender notes an additional reason for Cherokee ambivalence about the manuscripts:

> These medicinal texts were rarely discussed with outsiders in the 1990s. Some people felt that the possession and use of these notebooks conflicted with their Christianity. Still, several people I talked to said their families still possessed such books. There seemed to be considerable demand for the knowledge these notebooks contained and at the same time ambivalence toward them on the part of their owners. Some people distinguished between formulas for medicine or curing and those for magic and conjuring. Conjuring in particular was seen by some as being in tension with or incompatible with Christianity. [2002:93–94]

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