"In a Good Way": Repatriation, Community and Development in Kitigan Zibi

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Abstract: In 2005 Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg successfully repatriated human remains from the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Though repatriation case studies often concentrate on the importance of the material heritage being returned to source communities, the effects of the repatriation process itself can be equally important. This article demonstrates how the repatriation process developed community capacity in Kitigan Zibi and increased unity within the larger Algonquin Nation. The overall process shows the role that repatriation can play in larger questions of Indigenous autonomy, regardless of what material is involved in the claim or whether it is successfully returned to the community.

Keywords: repatriation, Aboriginal, capacity, solidarity, museum, Algonquin

Résumé : En 2005, la communauté Anishinabeg de Kitigan Zibi a rapatrié des restes humains du Musée canadien des civilisations. Si la plupart des études de cas sur le rapatriement misent sur l'importance du retour du patrimoine matériel à la communauté d'origine, le processus de rapatriement lui-même peut aussi avoir des répercussions importantes sur la communauté. Cet article explique l'impact que le rapatriement a eu sur le développement de ressources communautaires à Kitigan Zibi, ainsi que le rôle qu'il a joué dans la création d'un sentiment de solidarité au sein de la Nation algonquine. Le processus de rapatriement s'inscrit ainsi comme un aspect non négligeable de la question plus large de l'autonomie culturelle autochtone, et ce, peu importe le patrimoine matériel qui fait l'objet de la demande ou même le résultat cette demande.

Mots-clés : Rapatriement, Autochtone, Développement communautaire, Solidarité, Musée, Algonquins

Introduction

This article examines the 2005 repatriation of human remains from the Canadian Museum of Civilization to the Algonquin Anishinabeg community of Kitigan Zibi. As the tenth anniversary of the repatriation of human remains to Kitigan Zibi approaches, it is of interest to examine the impact of this event on the community and the relationship the community and its members currently have with the repatriation. Repatriation will be presented in its broader context before the specific case of Kitigan Zibi is examined in more detail.

Many existing studies of repatriation cases have quite naturally focused on the objects or the human remains being transferred from a scientific or academic community to a claiming community. The effects of repatriation are consequently often measured in relation to the physical material involved or the intangible heritage, cultural knowledge and ancestral relationships associated with it. However, the effects of the repatriation process itself, independent of a successful claim or return, have until now attracted less attention. Through the case study of Kitigan Zibi, we will show that a repatriation process can impact the community involved, independent of the material at the centre of the claim. For Kitigan Zibi, this includes the unifying effects the repatriation process had on the larger Algonquin Anishinabeg community and the role the repatriation played in building community capacity.

Repatriation in Context

Repatriation is one of the more complex (and often contentious) issues within the world of museums today. Though the return of objects from museums to First Nations communities is not necessarily new,[1] the subject has come into focus since the early 1990s with the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act in the United States (U.S. Department of the Interior 2015) and the publication of *Turning the Page* (Hill and Nicks 1992), a policy paper which lays out

guidelines for the relationships between museums and First Nations communities in Canada. For anthropologists and other researchers, repatriation is turning into a rich topic of study. The return of objects or human remains from museum to source community brings into confrontation ideas on ownership (Simpson 1996), control (Kreps 2003) and identity (Kaplan 1994), as well as delving into the wellspring of colonialism's checkered past. It concretizes the changing relationships between central museums and colonized or marginalized peoples and signifies a way of reconciling "the legacy of colonial collecting practices" (Verna 2011:1). Repatriation research has examined legal issues (see, for example, the work of Catherine Bell, including Bell and Napoleon 2008), differences in traditional and scientific knowledge (Conaty 2004:63–64, 77), and the role repatriation can play in defining or imposing cultural categories (Dubuc 2013b). Recent technological advances have led to discussions surrounding digitization and electronic access to cultural heritage (Dawson et al. 2011), called *virtual repatriation* by some (Hennessy et al. 2012).

Though the reasons behind the complexity of repatriation are many, it is not made any easier by the patchwork of structures surrounding repatriation requests, be they in the form of legislation, policies or best practices. Within Canada there is no federal legislation dealing specifically with repatriation claims. The First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act (Revised Statues of Alberta 2000, F-14, p. 8) has provincial legislation in place, though it applies only to the Government of Alberta's collections at the Royal Alberta Museum and the Glenbow Museum. Other museums, such as the Royal Ontario Museum (2012) and the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia (University of British Columbia 2000), have their own internal repatriation policies. Repatriation is also associated with land claim settlements, as in the case of the Nisga'a Nation claim settled in 1998 (Nisga'a Final Agreement Act. SBC 1999, Chapter 17). As mentioned, since 1990 some repatriation requests in the United States have been governed by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. Other countries, such as France (Ministère de la Culture et Communication France 2012) and Sweden (Cardinal 2003), have inalienability laws which prevent repatriation, unless superseded by an act of government.

Most ideas surrounding repatriation deal either with human remains or with culturally significant objects.[2] For many communities, repatriation and increased control of their cultural heritage, currently unavailable to them, are "fundamental to the continuity, revival and survival of their cultural identity in the face of past and ongoing forces of colonization" (Bell and Patterson 2009:3). For the Pekuakamiulnatsh of Mastheuiatsh, this increased contact with their cultural heritage is seen as a way to learn more about their past and the distinct nature of their culture (Conseil des Montagnais du Lac St-Jean 2005:26). For the Haida, it is a way to retrieve lost memories and transmit knowledge to future generations (Skidegate Repatriation and Cultural Committee 2007).

The debate that continues around the return of cultural heritage is in part due to the combination of legal and moral arguments both for and against the return of cultural property. The legitimacy of a museum's acquisition of First Nations' cultural property is sometimes challenged (Bell and Patterson 2009), and ethical arguments are made for its return, based on either the righting of past wrongs (Björnberg 2014) or its importance to the community compared to its institutional value to the museum. Compounding the difficulties faced by many First Nations communities, the framework in place to deal with repatriation is often based on Western legal systems and brings into focus the domination of colonial practices within the repatriation process itself.

As with cultural heritage, the repatriation of human remains is not without its challenges and controversies. However, most jurisdictions and institutions are in agreement that, whenever possible and desirable, human remains should be returned to their source communities. This has led some researchers to talk of the post–human remains era of repatriation (Dubuc 2013a). Even with the increasingly widespread acceptance of repatriating human remains, more often than not the burden is on the community requesting the repatriation to prove their case according to criteria established by the institution currently holding the remains (Office of the Auditor General of Canada 1998). The same is true in cases of repatriating cultural heritage.

The repatriation of a stone transformer figure, T'xwelátse, from the Burke Museum in Seattle, Washington, to the Stó:lō Nation in Chilliwack, British Columbia, is a good example of how complicated such cases can be. T'xwelátse was a shaman who was turned into stone by a great transformer being a long time ago to remind people to learn to live together in a good way. As part of a marriage in the 19th century, the approximately 91-centimetre-high stone figure of T'xwelátse was carried from the Chilliwack Valley in British Columbia to the Sumas Prairie in Washington State but was left there when the Stó:lō people returned to Chilliwack fleeing hostile vigilante groups. In 1892, stone T'xwelátse was

found by farmers near Sumas, Washington, and was sold to a local museum before eventually making his way into the collection of the Burke Museum. When he was rediscovered by the Stó:lō in 1991, it took 15 years of effort before he was returned to the community (Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre 2011).

Though the Burke Museum is governed by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, the Stó:lō are in Canada and are therefore not qualified recipients of a repatriation under these laws. Furthermore, T'xwelátse's status as human remains is culturally conditioned, and the act's definition of human remains was made with only human bones in mind (Schaepe and Joe 2006). Luckily for the Stó:lō, they were able to make a request for T'xwelátse's return as an object of cultural patrimony through a related American tribe, the Nooksack. Before the Stó:lō could see the return of their ancestor, they had to establish to the satisfaction of the Burke Museum that the Nooksack were a qualifying tribe, and that they had an affiliation with the Stó:lō. T'xwelátse's status as an object of cultural patrimony had to be proven, and the lack of competing claims for the object had to be demonstrated. Moreover, the Stó:lō had to prove that the stone figure at the Burke Museum was in fact T'xwelátse, and that the Burke Museum did not have the right of possession over him (Schaepe and Joe 2006). Though this case was complicated by cross-border jurisdictions, it is representative of the types of issues that can be present as part of repatriation requests.

From the Earth to the Earth: Kitigan Zibi, Kabeshinan and the Return of Human Remains

Kitigan Zibi is an Algonquin Anishinabeg community situated near Maniwaki, Quebec. At approximately 180 square kilometres, it is the largest Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation community in Canada. The three thousand-plus community members include a high number of post-secondary graduates in a variety of fields, including law and medicine. Kitigan Zibi does not have one primary economic generator, such as a casino or an electrical plant, but can claim over 150 individually-owned small businesses. The community enjoys a higher standard of living than most First Nations communities in Quebec, partly attributable to its close proximity to the Ottawa/Gatineau region and strong political representation dating back to the 1830s.

One of Kitigan Zibi's strengths and sources of pride is its strong and vibrant education sector, which has been controlled and administered by the community since 1980. The education sector currently includes schooling from kindergarten to grade 11, with language-immersion programs, and provides a variety of other programs including daycare, work paths, post-secondary education and cultural programming at the Kitigan Zibi Cultural Education Centre.

In the late 1990s, Kitigan Zibi was contacted by the National Capital Commission and the Canadian Museum of Civilization concerning the discovery along the Ottawa River near Lake Leamy of an Algonquin Anishinabeg encampment site containing pottery, arrowheads and a quantity of stone from the Lake Mistassini region. Archaeological digs conducted in partnerships between Kitigan Zibi, the National Capital Commission and the Canadian Museum of Civilization (now the Canadian Museum of History) took place every summer from 2001 to 2003, and eventually revealed one of the largest and most important archaeological sites in Quebec. *Kabeshinan*, an Algonquin word meaning "summer camp," was chosen as the project's name.

The archaeological excavation of the Kabeshinan project confirmed that this particular area of the Ottawa River system had been, and still is, a cross-roads for many different cultures, First Nations and Euro-Canadians alike. As a brochure produced during the time of the project says, "Witness to the ages, keepers of memory, *Kabeshinan* reveals the traces left by different groups of peoples across the years" (Kitigan Zibi Education Council 2002). It was during the first year of this project that Kitigan Zibi found out what was already suspected by some members of the community but was completely unknown to others: the collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization housed human remains which had been found on Algonquin traditional territory. The approximately five hundred bones in the museum's collection represented around thirty individuals and had been collected from 11 different sites along the Ottawa River by different groups since as early as 1843 (Hamilton 2010; Odjick 2004).

Kitigan Zibi requested a visit to the museum to see the remains, and a group of Elders made the 130-kilometre trip from Kitigan Zibi to Ottawa. It was on seeing the bones that the community decided that something had to be done (Logan 2003) (for a summary of the repatriation timeline, see Box 1).

In 2002 the Kitigan Zibi Education Council started discussions with the Canadian Museum of Civilization to request the repatriation of human remains to the community (Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg 2003:16). For the museum, such requests are guided by an internal repatriation policy that was developed in the spirit of the

Box 1: Repatriation Timeline

Summer 2001	First archaeological dig conducted as part of the Kabeshinan project.
Fall 2001	Kitigan Zibi confirms that the collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization contains Algonquin human remains and funerary objects.
January 2002	Repatriation discussion started with the Canadian Museum of Civilization.
October 2002	Resolution passed by the Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation Tribal Council authorizing Kitigan Zibi to act on behalf of other Algonquin Anishinabeg communities for this repatriation.
January 2003	Kitigan Zibi Repatriation Committee formed.
January 2003	Kitigan Zibi formally requests the return of all human remains and funerary objects.
February 2004	Kitigan Zibi begins community consultation with seven other Algonquin communities in Ontario and Quebec on the repatriation process.
March 2004	Members of the Kitigan Zibi Repatriation Committee attended a conference on aboriginal repatriation in Haida Gwaii.
June 2005	Human remains returned to Kitigan Zibi.
August 2005	Kitigan Zibi hosts First Nations International Repatriation Symposium.
Fall 2005	Kitigan Zibi Cultural Education Centre opens.

recommendations of the 1992 Task Force on Museums and First Peoples (Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation 2011:1). This policy lays out the conditions under which the museum will consider repatriation requests for human remains, associated objects or archival records. It is worth noting that these conditions were established solely by the museum, not jointly by all repatriating parties. Furthermore, they are very similar to those used in deciding First Nations land claims (Hanna 2003:244). For example, to consider the repatriation request, the museum needed assurance that no other First Nations claimed the remains and that Kitigan Zibi was authorized to act on behalf of other Algonquin Anishinabeg communities. Furthermore, Kitigan Zibi needed to prove that the remains were in fact those of Algonquin Anishinabeg people and that Kitigan Zibi had a direct historical connection with the remains.

To satisfy the museum's two latter points, the director of the Kitigan Zibi education sector wrote to the 26 other First Nations communities in the area to establish that there were no competing claims to the remains. In October 2002 the Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation Tribal Council, which represents seven of the ten Algonquin communities, passed a resolution stating that Kitigan Zibi would act on behalf of other communities to repatriate the human remains and return them to Mother Earth within Algonquin Anishinabeg territory. The museum's demand that Kitigan Zibi prove a historical relationship with the remains was harder to satisfy and eventually became one of the main points of contention between the two parties.

The museum considered that the Algonquin people and culture had been present in their current location for about seven hundred years. Many of the remains had been found in archaeological sites estimated to be five thousand or six thousand years old, which prompted museum archaeologists to claim that there was no way to connect them with the people of Kitigan Zibi (Logan 2003). The bones were too old and antedated Algonquin culture. The museum suggested that scientific testing could help resolve this point by providing more accurate dates for the bones.

The Kitigan Zibi Repatriation Committee was formed in 2003 and conducted extensive community consultation to better understand public opinion concerning the repatriation. Three rounds of consultation with the other Algonquin Anishinabeg communities revealed both a strong desire to return the remains to Mother Earth and an active community opposition to DNA and scientific testing on the remains (Kitigan Zibi Education Council 2004). Consequently, Kitigan Zibi did not agree to have the bones submitted to testing to help prove or disprove their ancestry. The museum lamented that, without scientific testing, the full information and knowledge that the bones could reveal would never come to light. Though the Algonquin Nation was not able to overcome museum opposition to the perceived loss of knowledge that would come from the reburial of the bones, the repatriation committee did successfully argue that, proven or not, the cultural origins of the remains were immaterial to the discussion at hand.

The bones were found on Algonquin Anishinabeg traditional lands, and, through their continued stewardship of that land, it was the Algonquin Nation's duty to return them to the earth in a good way, regardless of their assigned cultural origins. This argument is expanded by Canadian archaeologist Margaret Hanna when she states that "people of today are connected with people

of the past by virtue of a common experience of the land," making them cultural ancestors, if not genetic ancestors (2003:245).

This is in contrast to the well-known case of the human remains now known as Kennewick Man. Repatriation of the skeleton found near Walla Walla in Washington State to local Native American groups was refused, primarily because kinship could not be proven between modern tribes and the human remains (Coleman and Dysart 2005:12). Furthermore, the courts ruled that nothing even proved that Kennewick Man was or should be considered Native American (Bruning 2006:503), despite the fact that geographical information and oral history collected from tribal members demonstrated a cultural affiliation with Kennewick Man (Coleman and Dysart 2005:11). While Native American opposition to scientific testing remained, the court ruling cleared the way for the scientific community to analyze the remains.

The community consultation in Kitigan Zibi led to the repatriation committee's formal demand for repatriation by June 2005. However, no firm consensus emerged on where to bury the remains. Most people consulted did agree that Elders should play a lead role in the return to the earth. Because people considered these remains to be their relatives, they wanted the bones to stay together, as a family would. In March 2004 full endorsement for the project was given by over a hundred Elders present at an Algonquin-Anishinabeg Language Initiative Conference. To further inform themselves on repatriation and to hear different perspectives on the subject, community members from Kitigan Zibi attended a conference on aboriginal repatriation in Haida Gwaii on Canada's Northwest coast in March 2004. Organized by the Haida Repatriation Committee to respond in part to queries by other First Nations groups about their repatriation efforts, the conference brought together attendees and speakers from museums and First Nations communities (Haida Gwaii Observer 2004).

On June 20, 2005, the human remains arrived in Kitigan Zibi in a U-Haul trailer, directly from the museum's loading dock. A group of community members stayed with the remains through the night, and a ceremony was held the next day to correspond with the summer solstice. It had been decided that the remains should be returned to the earth within Kitigan Zibi lands, and a space had been prepared using earthmovers and heavy machinery. Kitigan Zibi decided to return the remains to the earth in birchbark boxes, lined with cedar and animal hides and protected within burial chambers made of red pine and lined with rocks. A ceremony was held, and the burial chambers were covered in a mound of earth. This mound was further covered with large rocks to ensure that no one would be able to disturb the resting place and to help respect the community's expressed desire to protect sacred burial sites. Ceremonies conducted after the burial have said that the spirits are satisfied with the care taken to allow the remains to lie securely at rest.

For the people of Kitigan Zibi, the question of where and how to bury repatriated human remains was similar to that faced by many other Indigenous groups in the same situation. While most cultures have existing burial ceremonies or practices, few have reburial ceremonies. On the surface, the ceremony decided on by Kitigan Zibi is similar to that developed by the Haida. Where the Haida put their ancestor into the earth in cedar bentwood boxes, the Anishinabeg of Kitigan Zibi used boxes made of birchbark. We might wonder to what extent the Anishinabeg ceremony was influenced by their contact with the Haida during the 2004 conference.

More important than the final protocols chosen is the process used to arrive at these decisions. As part of their repatriation efforts, the Haida Nation developed a reburial ceremony that built on existing systems and practices through consultation with community Elders (Joseph 2013; Krmpotich 2011:146). The same is true for the people of Kitigan Zibi. In both cases, the new practice created for the reburial uses important cultural references—birchbark and animal hides for the people of Kitigan Zibi—and fits within existing cultural norms.

Though a manifestly important event for the community in 2005, longer-term interest in the repatriation is less overt. The repatriation is not currently celebrated in any official way. It is not regularly feasted or used in any organized way for cultural education. The burial site and the remains themselves only rarely figure into larger community discussions, though they do get referenced occasionally. For example, the wooded area interspersed with trails located near the burial site was being used at Halloween for haunted hayrides. However, this practice was stopped when community Elders complained that it ridiculed the bones.

Even as we might wonder whether the tenth anniversary of the repatriation will be celebrated, and how, it deserves recognition as the first of its kind for Kitigan Zibi; it gave people hope for future cultural gains, and it impacted the community in both obvious and subtle ways. Though future study will undoubtedly show that the effects on the community were many, we wish to examine two such effects in more detail. The repatriation served to promote an increased sense of community within the larger Algonquin Nation, at least temporarily, and contributed to help increase community capacity.

"Together as a Family": Repatriation and Community

Perhaps as important as the repatriation itself was the way that the repatriation process brought members of the Algonquin Nation together. Internal politics within the Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation have been fractured through the effects of colonialism, but the unique nature and reality of the repatriation and the interest it generated within the community helped create unity, if only for the duration of the repatriation process. On the day of repatriation, the entire Algonquin Nation agreed on something and stood together for a common goal. In examining aspects of the process, it becomes clear that not only was this sense of unity generated by the repatriation project, but it also increased as the project progressed.

This unity was already present in the fall of 2002, when the Algonquin Nation Tribal Council representing seven of the ten Algonquin Anishinabeg communities passed a motion supporting Kitigan Zibi as the repatriating party, but a sense of unity was also developed through the community consultations that began in the early part of 2004. These consultations generated a significant amount of interest within all ten Algonquin communities. The repatriation committee returned to each community three times, and participation was consistently high, in terms of both the percentage of the community involved and the individual number of participants (Kitigan Zibi Education Council 2004). Unity between the different communities was further strengthened by the discovery that the responses given by the different communities were remarkably similar, helping build an increased sense of commonality and solidarity.

Though the human remains were only returned to the earth on June 21, 2005, intense preparation took place in the two weeks leading up to the date. Community members young and old participated in clearing the burial site, constructing the burial chambers and putting the bones into birchbark boxes, highlighting the inclusive nature of the repatriation project. All ten Algonquin Anishinabeg communities were present at the burial ceremony, one of few such displays of solidarity in recent memory and, according to community members, a level not seen again until recent support for Elsipogotg anti-fracking protests in New Brunswick (aanationtalk 2013).

There was widespread support for the repatriation project while it was being undertaken, but since then opinions within the community have varied. Many different religious and spiritual beliefs are present within Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg. Some people support what they term "native ways," whereas others look down on tradition or have adopted some form of Western religion. Consequently, while some see this repatriation as an important moment in the community's history, others see it as less significant. Some blame the buried remains for bad luck or negative events which have happened in the community. Others who subscribe to more traditional spiritual beliefs have worked to make sure the remains are respected.

Like any community, Kitigan Zibi is composed of different people with different opinions. Though it would be an exaggeration to say that the community unanimously supported every aspect of the repatriation process, it is not an exaggeration to say that the community came together around the repatriation process, culminating in the strong community participation at the reburial ceremony. Furthermore, support for the project and participation in both decision-making and other related events by all ten Algonquin communities was comparatively high during the entire process, demonstrating a larger sense of community created by the repatriation.

"Research Our Past to Strengthen Our Future": Repatriation and Building of Community Capacity

There is a tendency to want to associate a repatriation request with the past. It is a way of honouring the remains and paying respects to ancestors. In the case of Kitigan Zibi this respect for the past is evident. However, the connection to an ongoing stewardship of the land places this repatriation within a larger timeline. It is not necessarily only about the past but is also about the present and the future. The return of an object or of human remains to a community helps to anchor the community in its traditions and in its past. Such a return also has the potential to create something new. Repatriation can inspire new artistic production (Krmpotich 2011), renew cultural traditions (Simpson 2008:74) and provide opportunities for educating the general public on processes of Indigenous cultural safekeeping. It can also contribute to building community capacity.

Following the definition used by the United Nations Development Programme (2010:2), *capacity* is "the ability of individuals, institutions, and societies to perform functions, solve problems and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner." Because of the benefits it can bring, enhancing First Nations capacity was one of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996). Kitigan Zibi has been developing its community capacity by undertaking important cultural and social endeavours since well before the Kabeshinan project of the early 2000s or the Royal Commission of the first half of the 1990s. Kitigan Zibi assumed control

over its school system in 1980 and successfully defended its right to hunt and fish on its territorial land before the Supreme Court of Canada in 1996 (*R v. Côté, S.C.R.* 139). The repatriation process detailed above would not have been possible without the structural, organizational and human capacity already in place in Kitigan Zibi. However, by the same token, the efforts the community put into the repatriation project have, in turn, led to a further increase in community potential through the development of human and physical resources.

In 2004 the Kitigan Zibi Education Council and Band Council approved the construction of a new cultural education centre, which opened in late 2005. Intimately linked to the repatriation process, the Kitigan Zibi Cultural Education Centre was in part designed to hold the community's museum, which includes, among other things, an exhibit donated by the Museum of Civilization and some of the findings from the Kabeshinan project. The building also houses the offices of the Kitigan Zibi Education Sector and regularly hosts meetings and cultural events. Since its construction, the Kitigan Zibi Cultural Education Centre has served as a touchstone for developing community expertise in museum studies and fostering interest in Anishinabeg culture both within the community and outside of it.

In August 2005, Kitigan Zibi hosted the Second International First Nations Repatriation Symposium, intended as a way to "collaborate, liaise and network with those organizations presently doing research and preparing work in the area of repatriation" (Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg 2006:30). The community is still benefiting from connections made with other partners during the repatriation process, and the experience gained is being used in new repatriation requests.[3] The repatriation project was, for the most part, led by Kitigan Zibi's director of education at the time, Gilbert Whiteduck, who stepped down in 2005. Whiteduck's election as chief of Kitigan Zibi in 2008 can also be seen as the redeployment of experience gained during the repatriation process elsewhere within the community.

Repatriation: Return and Renewal

Repatriation is a powerful tool for helping First Nations communities regain control of their past. Speaking of the Kitigan Zibi repatriation, Whiteduck has said, "[I]t's a reclaiming of our ancestry, it's a reclaiming of our story. It's that reclaiming of what's been taken away" (Wallace 2005). However, as the interconnectedness of territory and the return of the human remains in the case of Kitigan Zibi shows, repatriation is not an isolated phenomenon. It is only one part of a larger movement of Indigenous cultural empowerment as represented by Indigenous thinkers such as Roger C. Echo-Hawk (2011) and Vine Deloria Jr (1969), to name only some of the most well known. Furthermore, by resisting, at least partially, the Museum of Civilization's imposition of definitions, the Kitigan Zibi Repatriation Committee asserted an Indigenous identity which stands separate from the colonial structures that try to erase, as Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel put it, "the histories and geographies that provide the foundation for Indigenous cultural identities and sense of self" (2005:598).

By inscribing repatriation within larger questions of cultural autonomy (see, for example, Noble 2002:113) and by examining the ways in which it benefits the communities involved (Simpson 2008:75), it becomes clear that repatriation is not only about the past. Their relationship with the human remains, through a shared and ongoing connection to the land, situates the Algonquin Anishinabeg within a timeless forever. The increased unity among Algonquin Anishinabeg communities was certainly in and for the present time of the repatriation process. The creative power of repatriation seen in its ability to build community capacity is about making something new. It is about regaining the past, but it is also about building for the future. This helps situate repatriation within contemporary ideas on Indigenous continuity. Far from disappearing, as colonial thought believed, First Nations communities are still present and are returning to their past to help build their future (Clifford 2013).

Repatriation is not part of any First Nation's traditional culture. However, both through the generation of new cultural practices and through the repatriation process itself, repatriation provides opportunities for unique culture expression. Seen in this light, the process of repatriation can be beneficial to a community, regardless of whether a claim is successful or not. While not limited to repatriation, the complexity of most claims means that communities must mobilize significant resources to continue the repatriation process. This mobilization contributes to community development and can be used in the future to undertake other projects and can contribute to cultural autonomy.

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Notes

1 For example, objects confiscated as part of a ban on potlatches were returned to the Kwakwaka'wakw starting in the 1970s.

2 The 2005 repatriation to Kitigan Zibi presented herein involved the return of human remains along with some associated funerary objects, and, as such, this article generally concentrates on the repatriation of human remains.

3 Kitigan Zibi is currently exploring the repatriation of culturally significant objects as part of a larger Community University Research Alliance project in partnership with the Ilnu community of Mashteuiatsh and Université de Montréal under lead researcher Élise Dubuc. This partnership has led to a variety of projects, including the research that forms much of the content of this article.

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