

RECOVERING VOICES

Seminar Series in Endangered Languages and Indigenous Knowledge



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Image: Discussing Trobriand myths from the Leach Collection with Mlabwema, Taubuna and Tomdebi in Bawai Village, February 2013

presents:

The Trobriand Tales: a Repatriation Project

Thursday June 9, 2016

12:00pm -1:00pm

Rose Room (Room 337), NMNH

Museums are increasingly pressed to “give back” to communities. Giving back is not simply a return of objects, it is also the reintegration of knowledge associated to these objects. Repatriation processes often start with a dialogue that sets the basis for collaborative partnerships between museums and communities. These partnerships can be conceived as a series of exchanges, where all the parts involved explore the possibilities of obtaining mutual benefits. Museums can update their records and offer more accurate information to their audiences. Source communities, on the other hand, can revitalize lost or endangered systems of knowledge. Collaborations also facilitate the intergenerational and cross-cultural transmission of key practices and values that are essential for the maintenance of the communities’ identity. In this sense, what is repatriated is not always tangible: immaterial cultural expressions like music, dance, poetry or body decorations are as important as the hard objects from which they cannot be dissociated. Repatriation thus becomes an effort of integration.

The repatriation of a collection of myths and tales from the Trobriand Islands of Papua New Guinea is a good example of how material and immaterial cultural expressions intersect in, and beyond, the museum. Part of the larger Recovering Voices Project, the repatriation of the Jerry Leach Collection of Trobriand Folklore brings together orality and literacy, old myths and new stories, and the history of a collection and a collection of histories, all of which speak directly to the dynamic aspects of Trobriand culture.

For more information or to request a visitor badge contact RecoveringVoices@si.edu or call 202-633-5039



An initiative by the National Museum of Natural History,
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Recovering Voices
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