Strands Which Refuse to be Braided: Hair Samples from Beatrice Blackwood's Ojibwe Collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum

Atop a filing cabinet in the heart of the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford, sits a flat rectangular box filled with archival envelopes. Two of these contain children's drawings, each showing a man, woman, and child; two more contain small paper envelopes labelled with the name, age, and sex of individuals. These little envelopes contain short locks of human hair. Both the drawings and the hair samples were acquired by Beatrice Blackwood, who later became a staff member of the Pitt Rivers Museum [hereafter PRM], during her fieldwork in North America from 1924-27. Blackwood also photographed in the Native American communities in which she worked, and these images are now held in the Photographs and Manuscripts section of the museum, together with her teaching papers and correspondence, and with the hair samples, drawings, and artefacts she collected for the museum, comprise the documentary remains of her long and distinguished career within the PRM.

This article concerns the hair samples in Blackwood's collection, specifically ones from the Ojibwe community of Red Lake, Minnesota. It explores the emotive and difficult conjuncture of meanings these samples have as the result of Ojibwe beliefs combined with the history of the cutting and analysis of hair by Whites as part of attempts to control Ojibwe people in various ways, and with the status of the hair samples as artefacts in an overseas museum collection. This tangle of meanings has not yet been smoothed, despite

fieldwork described in this article which made people in Red Lake aware of the existence of the collection and during which their advice was sought on its curation.

Hair has been described in the anthropological literature as an extension of the person; one might say that in the way it enhances the body and then tapers to nothing, it connects the person to both the physical and the spiritual realms of existence. The manipulation of hair by combing, cutting, and styling is widely understood as an intimate and powerful form of socialization. Although quite different, both Leach's classical article on "Magical Hair" (1958) and Hallpike's response to it ("Social Hair," 1969), argue that hair has deep and widespread social meaning: cut or allowed to grow long and matted during mourning, and highly decorated during courtship, for instance. Hair thus communicates the interior state of the individual to the external social world, and is actively deployed by individuals to do so (and see McCracken 1997). Hair can also represent an individual in his or her absence, as anyone who has seen Victorian mourning jewellery made of hair from the deceased would understand. In keeping hair cut from the deceased, whether this is publicly displayed or privately kept, the living individual also negotiates his or her relationship with the deceased and with others in society.

Hair can also be manipulated against one's will, an equally powerful symbol of external social control. Prisoners' and military initiates' heads are routinely shaved, not just for purposes of hygiene but also to establish psychological and social control over them. Scalping and the shaving of the heads of prostitutes have also been widely practised as punishments of enemies and transgressors of social norms, respectively. The deliberate

cutting of hair, especially of traditional braids, was used in schools for Native American children as part of a process designed to separate the children from what was seen as their contaminating culture. Beatrice Blackwood's taking of hair samples from Native children at school, and the samples becoming museum artefacts and scientific data in an unknown overseas museum context, are just part of the background to the understanding of these materials by people in Red Lake as existing uneasily between the very personal and the externally controlled, between person and object.

In their little envelopes, named and numbered, the hair samples have been museum artefacts since 1925. Museum artefacts have oddly layered existences which also reflect a tension between the physical and the social. They are obviously physical, and in this layer of their existence are often seen as passive: being placed on shelves for display, being gazed at. Their active lives are those we cannot see: their ability to link makers and collectors, researchers, curators, visitors and the descendants of those who made the artefacts, and thus to function as bridges across time and across cultures. Museum collections embody the intersecting histories and agendas of collector, institution, and source community members: they are rich sources for understanding the nature of relations between peoples at the moment of collecting as well as afterwards, with the new meanings assigned to them as museum artefacts and as objects of material heritage. As Gosden and Knowles (2001:4) have recently observed, artefacts exist "at the centre of a mass of historical connections and debates, some of which are ongoing." Sometimes, they can also be seen as embodying the ruptures between histories, between peoples, between generations.[1]

Within museum anthropology, this linking property of artefacts has come to be especially significant, for it holds the potential for forging a kind of rapprochement on certain elements of the past. In particular, it offers the opportunity to understand the colonial contexts in which artefacts were typically separated from their communities of origin and transferred to Western museums, and to bring together complementary perspectives on artefacts and on the pasts of Western scholars and indigenous peoples. It also provides an opportunity for analysing the relations of power inherent in the subsequent curation and interpretation of ethnographic artefacts within museums, and for exploring the continuing meanings of historic artefacts for their communities of origin today. These emphases within ethnographic curation which make historic collections such fruitful subjects have developed within a broader context of attention to relations of power in anthropology—in the present as well as the past. If the existence of a collection reflects past relations between peoples, then present-day practices of curation and display reflect current ones. If we are trying to work within a new anthropological paradigm which encourages the sharing of power and a balance of voice in the production of ethnographic texts and the curation of ethnographic artefacts, then consultation with members of the source communities for ethnographic collections provides significant opportunities for such sharing, and museum staff are increasingly expected to undertake consultative research projects on their collections. While this process has been more difficult for institutions in countries distant from indigenous source communities, it is starting to happen, and promises significant gains in knowledge as well as new perspectives for interpreting collections. It also offers opportunities for indigenous peoples who seek to locate and

care for their material heritage, much of which is held in UK and European institutions very distant from source communities.

With such expectations, and as curator for the Americas collections of the PRM, I began consultation in 1999 with members of several Ojibwe[2] communities in Minnesota, USA, from where Beatrice Blackwood had collected drawings, hair samples, and photographs in the 1920s. The range of materials in this collection promised opportunities to revitalize the relationships between peoples (Native American and English, Ojibwe and anthropologist) represented in it, and I hoped to gather information on the collection, as well as to return information and photographs. I also hoped to begin the process of creating a collaborative exhibition about the collection and its historically and culturally varying meanings. To use an Ojibwe metaphor, I hoped to braid together the disparate strands of Ojibwe and outsider history and meaning involved in the collection and its relocation to Oxford, and to use Ojibwe perspectives, voices, and choices as much as curatorial ones in understanding these materials. In the end, few of these things have been possible. While the Pitt Rivers Museum has gained enhanced understanding of these collection, it also became apparent that some of the meanings of the artefacts, and some of the relations they embodied, were so different and problematic that they could not be reconciled. There were strands here which refused to be braided, and which have so far prevented the establishment of fruitful long-term relations between the museum and these Ojibwe communities. These are literal strands as well as metaphorical ones, for they concern the hair samples. In this case, consultation has indeed revitalized the relations

surrounding museum artefacts, but has highlighted the problematic historic relations within which they were collected, rather than resolving these in any way.

This article outlines the process of consultation with source community members and of the discovery of the historical context and meanings surrounding the hair samples in Blackwood's Ojibwe collections. It also explores the implications of current theory about material culture which sees artefacts as points of contact between peoples, and focuses on tracing the movements and shifting meanings of artefacts as a way of understanding the relations between the peoples involved. The article describes only the first stages of research and consultation regarding this collection, but may serve as a useful reference point for those wishing to undertake similar work.

Anthropology, Oxford, and Beatrice Blackwood

Beatrice Blackwood took an undergraduate degree in English at Oxford in 1912, and returned to obtain the Diploma in Anthropology in 1918; she also obtained a BSc. in Human Anatomy (Gosden and Knowles 2001:140; Knowles 2000:253). She began work as a research assistant in the University Museum of Natural History, but increasingly focused on cultural and technical elements of human life. In 1924 she began a three-year research trip in North America, funded by a Laura Spelman Rockefeller grant, exploring the relationship between intelligence and "race." When she returned to Oxford from this trip in 1927, she became University Demonstrator in Ethnology and in 1935 transferred to the adjoining PRM, founded by General Pitt Rivers in 1884 and dedicated to the study of human cultures.[3] Blackwood is best known outside the Pitt Rivers Museum for her

fieldwork and collecting in the Pacific which she undertook in 1929, a much more in-depth project than her North American work had been. She never became interested in the theoretical developments occurring within anthropology in the 1920s or after, and indeed felt uncomfortable at the drift of anthropology away from material culture (Gosden and Knowles 2001:141; Knowles 2000). After her North American trip, during which she learned much about fieldwork and collecting, her interests remained focused throughout her career on the details and documentation of material culture and its social production.

The North American trip was an important first professional experience for Blackwood. It seems to have arisen from interests she developed learning physical anthropology and later working for Professor Arthur Thomson, head of the University Museum of Natural History. At the same time, Blackwood already had strong interests in social anthropology and material culture, and began collecting and arranging exchanges of material to augment the PRM collections. Her anthropological perceptions of Native American peoples and artefacts were very much those of the time, and she tended to categorize things as ‘traditional’ or ‘modern’. In November 1925, justifying a decision to make an uncomfortable journey in order to work in one of the Ojibwe communities, she wrote in her diary that “Ponemah is still comparatively untouched & almost entirely pagan.”

Despite such preconceptions, she was alert to the social, economic, and political realities faced by Native people, and early in her research trip decided that such factors and prejudice counted for far more in determining what people’s lives and abilities were like

than inherited factors did. Her first months in the United States were spent at African-American colleges, where she was appalled to discover the discrimination faced by Blacks and began to grapple with the political implications of standard measures of "race." It was after this that she began working with Native American people, and discovered that they faced many of the same problems. Her disenchantment with terms such as "race" and "intelligence" is made clear in the monograph (Blackwood 1927) which was the primary product of this research trip. While her frameworks were firmly of the period, Blackwood began this report by acknowledging that scores on mental tests "vary in direct ratio with the social status of the subject" (1927:8), and she concluded by stating that "intelligence…can be defined only as what is measured by the tests" and that " 'race' should carry a biological definition only" (Blackwood 1927:111). In other words, she was rejecting any direct link between intelligence and physical inheritance. Her dissatisfaction with such terms is also expressed more quietly within the collections she made: few of the envelopes containing hair samples have ever been opened, suggesting that she never looked at them after acquiring them,[4] and the children's drawings were only ever catalogued in 1994. Essentially, once she returned from the field, she never used this material for the purposes she had originally intended, although some of it was used for teaching. If collections embody the intent of their collectors, this one suggests a great deal of ambiguity, and changing meanings and intentions over the course of time.

Making the Collection

Despite her growing conviction that "race" was an inadequate term for what she was discovering, Blackwood moved across North America in 1924-27 measuring skin colour, taking hair samples, obtaining genealogical data on her subjects, taking photographs, and making notes. Her prestigious Oxford affiliation meant that officials were willing to assist her in many ways, from providing transportation and accommodation to voting her an adjunct faculty member of the Yale Institute of Psychiatry at a time when the only other women in the department were secretaries (Blackwood field diaries 1924-27:6 October 1924; Blackwood 1927:v). When she began working with Native American people, she drew on a network of Indian Agents, storekeepers, school principals, university professors and museum curators whose work gave them precisely the contacts and access Blackwood needed to obtain her data. Thus, at Nett Lake, she socialised with the Agency Superintendent, Mr Scott, and the reservation doctor, Dr Guthrie (Field Diary 1924-27, 30 October 1925), and checked her data with Mr. Isham, the Indian Agent. At Red Lake she met the school principal and staff, and was accommodated in staff quarters at the hospital (7 November 1925). Miss Deedie, the Matron of the school, assisted her in making physical measurements of people there (14 November 1925). Blackwood benefited from the structures of power as well as from personal contacts: on 16 November, during the payment of treaty annuity money at Red Lake, Blackwood noted, "Set up my instruments in a room in the office & caught a number of the women as they came for their payment."

Blackwood's collection was influenced by the nature of her fieldwork, which was done as part of an intense, cross-continent tour during which she made short stays in many Native communities. She spent just under three weeks in northern Minnesota Ojibwe communities in the autumn of 1925. She never considered herself an expert on the Ojibwe, and based on surviving documentation did not either at the time or later correspond with or meet other ethnographers who were conducting intensive fieldwork with Ojibwe people in the 1920s and 1930s, such as Frances Densmore, Inez Hilger, or Ruth Landes.

While in the Ojibwe communities of Red Lake (including the villages of Ponemah and Red Lake), Blackwood obtained drawings from schoolchildren. The drawings were collected at Cross Lake Indian Boarding School (in Ponemah) and Red Lake Indian School. They were intended to facilitate cross-cultural comparison, so as she did across North America, the children were asked to draw a man, a woman, and a child. Blackwood probably intended these to illustrate "traditional" and "acculturated" elements of Native cultures. The drawings, which record each child's name, are varied. Some are keenly-observed depictions of reservation life and clothing of the time, while others, depicting Pilgrim families in stylized costume, may be copies of images on the classroom wall. These last were disparaged by Blackwood (in the typical anthropological salvage paradigm of the times) as having been copied from mail-order catalogues such as Sears and Roebuck (3 November 1925).

Blackwood herself made use of Sears and Roebuck: the hair samples she collected were placed in small payment envelopes from this company or from Montgomery, Ward and Co., another popular department store. They were still in these envelopes when I became aware of their existence. Since most of my previous research has been on historic Ojibwe culture (Peers 1994, Peers and Brown 2001), I was aware that hair is generally disposed of very carefully among these people, since they believe that it can be used magically to harm the person from whom it comes (see, for instance, Densmore 1979(1929):107; Hilger 1992(1951):160). That Blackwood had been able to collect these samples was therefore puzzling, doubly so because in her field diaries she makes no mention of acquiring them. However, after correlating the names on the children's drawings with the names on the hair samples, it became clear that the hair samples were collected from many of the same children at schools where Blackwood obtained drawings.[5] Blackwood obtained 29 hair samples at Cross Lake Indian Boarding School in Ponemah and 11 samples at the Red Lake Indian Day School. I wondered what responses Ojibwe people today would have when they were told that the hair was in Oxford, and wished to ask their opinion on policies for storage and curation of the samples. Given the extent of research which occurs at Oxford, the Museum occasionally receives requests to test historic hair samples for various things ranging from mercury levels to nutritional analysis to DNA studies, and it seemed that the samples—some of whose donors might still be living—would provide an opportunity to formulate Museum policy in consultation with tribal members.

Blackwood obtained other kinds of materials in the same Ojibwe communities. She was a good photographer, and took twenty images at Ponemah, for which she recorded some names of people and places.[6] While many of these images are of subjects which Blackwood considered of anthropological interest (ranging from women carrying babies in cradleboards, to chopping ice to get water, to bark houses and graves), with a particular focus on "typical" "mixed-blood," and "full-blood" (her terms, common at the time) anthropological "types," the images are more sympathetic in tone than many taken by anthropologists of her era, and can be "read" as local history photographs as well as images reflecting anthropological history.[7]

Finally, on her second trip to America in 1939, Blackwood collected artefacts to fill in what she and her colleagues saw as "gaps" in the Museum's collections and to illustrate "traditional" Ojibwe material culture. Given the short duration of her stay in Ojibwe territory, these tended to be very readily available items, most of which seem to have been of the type produced for the tourist trade or for sale to anthropologists. They include deer rib matting needles, a mortar and pestle for pounding wild rice, a birchbark mokuk, bark fibre bags, a pair of beaded dance aprons, and a model cradleboard. She managed to purchase a ceremonial water drum and Midewiwin scroll[8], as well as completely secular material such as beaded belts which were produced in occupational therapy programs for tuberculosis patients.

The hair samples thus need to be seen within this total spectrum of materials collected by Blackwood in Ojibwe communities, as well as within the broader context of her

intellectual project and of anthropological discourses at the time. Although she was dubious of the notion of "race" by the time she reached Minnesota, she continued to think in terms of "traditional versus modern," and acquired the hair samples along with physical measurements to continue to test her ideas against received academic theories.

Bringing the Strands Together

The range of Blackwood's Ojibwe collections thus has the potential to evoke a corresponding range of responses from Ojibwe people, and for consultation to produce a variety of outcomes from Museum policy decisions to future collaborative research. To take matters forward, I contacted Marcia Anderson, the Chief Curator at the Minnesota Historical Society [hereafter MHS]. Anderson has worked with Ojibwe communities in Minnesota since the 1970s, and has a particular interest in 20th century materials produced by Ojibwe people for the tourist trade.

Anderson was immediately interested in the possibilities of the Blackwood collection, and came to Oxford in the spring of 1999 to examine it, adding considerably to the museum's documentation of the artefacts. She suggested that we approach Jody Beaulieu, a member of the Ojibwe community at Red Lake, who is the tribal archivist, is extremely knowledgeable about Ojibwe culture and history, and has helped MHS formulate policy regarding display of Ojibwe artefacts. Beaulieu's daughter Nokomis Paiz had worked as an intern at MHS under Anderson's supervision. Both were intrigued when told of the existence of Red Lake materials at PRM, and agreed to participate in the research. During the winter of 1999-2000, Anderson and Paiz fund-raised for the next trip to Oxford, we

exchanged emails about the collection, and I was able to enquire of Anderson and Beaulieu about the factors that PRM staff might consider regarding culturally-appropriate treatment of the hair samples and the sacred Midewiwin water drum that Blackwood had collected.

This communication initiated what I think of as the second strand in the braid of this research, which was the Ojibwe perspectives on Blackwood's collection, and the Ojibwe histories in which these materials are still embedded despite their transformation into museum artefacts. This Ojibwe strand is characterized both by continuity in meanings of objects across time, and by the new meanings that historical artefacts have acquired for Ojibwe people in the context of their changing circumstances. Pressures to assimilate divided Ojibwe people into "progressive" and "traditional" factions which advocated different paths to survival. By "survival" I mean physical as well as cultural, for in the face of dispossession from lands and resources, unemployment, coercive and sometimes harsh educational and missionary influences, prejudice, dire poverty, and the social dysfunction which stemmed from these pressures, Ojibwe people have been fighting for their lives and their culture since the mid-nineteenth century. Today, historical artefacts are valued by Ojibwe people as symbols of what they have been fighting for as well as for embodied cultural knowledge. And, like most other Native American peoples, the Ojibwe seek to exert control over their material heritage today—in forms ranging from removal of sensitive artefacts from display to repatriation—as part of broader efforts to regain control over their lives.[9] Their involvement in this research on Blackwood's

collection was, in their perspectives, intended to benefit Ojibwe people, rather than the PRM.[10]

Both the distinctive meanings of museum artefacts within Ojibwe perspectives, and the problem of reconciling these with anthropological and museum perspectives, were highlighted during Nokomis Paiz's visit to the PRM in the spring of 2000. The PRM is famed for its evocative Victorian-style displays, its crowded black-framed wooden cases and handwritten artefact tags. The historical depth and geographical breadth of its well-documented collections make them the focus of much lively research. The museum can, however, be seen as problematic by members of source communities. Indigenous visitors have displayed a range of responses to this special museum, but for some, including Paiz, its dark and old-fashioned atmosphere evokes the colonial past, and they respond to this with comments reflecting sorrow (at the effects of the past on their cultures), assertiveness (marking the desire for self-determination), and condemnation of colonialism (sometimes expressed as condemnation of the museum itself).[11]

In Paiz's case, this response was heightened by the fact that her primary experience of museums was her internship at MHS, a recently re-displayed space in which new exhibitions have been created with advice from Native American consultants. Partly in response to such advice, MHS has no human remains on display; PRM, in contrast, like many UK museums, displays artefacts which are made from or incorporate human remains, which proved distressing for Paiz. So did the presence of potentially animate sacred material from around the world in the museum's thematic displays, which she

found threatening because she did not know how to safely deal with it. When we came to examine the Blackwood collections, Paiz also found the tone of Blackwood's notes and photograph captions objectionably racialized. While they do contain phrases such as "typically Indian!" and "mother is half-breed," PRM staff (including myself) had tended to skim over these and to accept the basic premise and value of Blackwood's work. Paiz did neither; her perspective on the drawings and hair samples was that of a relative of many of the individuals whose names were on those materials, and of a representative of their community, and Blackwood's comments on "race" were offensive in that light.

I found myself spending much of this week-long visit trying to explain and indeed to justify Blackwood's work to Paiz. She had difficulty seeing anything of value in Blackwood's research, and found it hard to accept Blackwood's use of physical anthropological techniques, her use of white power networks to obtain research subjects, and her taking of hair samples and children's drawings. She found it even harder to square this methodology with my explanation that Blackwood was to some extent trying to disprove the assumptions about "race" current at the time. Equally, I found myself constantly translating between institutions, between eras, and between cultures. To explain the PRM to a museum studies student is relatively easy; to see it through Paiz' eyes as the product, in part, of historic colonial forces which had gravely affected her people, was very challenging. Marcia Anderson and another MHS staff member, Cindy Hall, who accompanied Paiz to Oxford for this visit, understood this predicament, and were exceptionally helpful in "translating" and in defusing the tension which sometimes resulted from the gaps we were attempting to bridge. By the end of the week Paiz had

made significant contributions to the understanding of PRM staff about Native American perspectives on museum issues, and we were pleased to implement some of her suggestions.[12] The experience made clear, however, that museum research involving source community members involves contested understandings between cultural perspectives and systems of power at every step of the way, and that it does not necessarily lead to any reconciliation between these.

The sense that some things could be brought together from our different perspectives, but that others simply could not, continued during the next phase of the project, which involved my going to Paiz' and Beaulieu's community of Red Lake in September 2000.[13] I took gift copies of all photographs Blackwood had made in each community, together with the information from the hair sample envelopes, and copies of the children's drawings; information about artefacts Blackwood collected in the region; and copies of the relevant portions of Blackwood's field diaries. I hoped to consult further about the meanings of the collection materials, and to establish preliminary plans for a collaborative exhibition on the collection and its different Ojibwe and Oxford contexts. Marcia Anderson made this trip possible by drawing on the established relationships between MHS and Ojibwe communities, and acting as guide and facilitator.

Returning information, photographs and artefacts to their source community is generally a very positive experience for both community and museum, leading to the revitalization of discourses about community history and very positive feedback for museum staff. This was a more complex case, however, because of the hair samples and their local meanings

within historical cross-cultural contexts. Bringing community members together with the collections was certainly instructive, but raised very difficult histories which have so far blocked the way to further research.

Following her visit to Oxford, Nokomis Paiz had returned to her community with copies of images and information on the Red Lake materials in the collection, and she and Jody Beaulieu had been investigating these with elders since. By the time we arrived, they had located several living individuals from whom Blackwood had collected hair samples or drawings in 1925. Beaulieu set up a meeting with one of these elders, Mrs. Goldie Johnson, as well as with Nokomis, Nokomis' grandmother (Jody's mother) Ruth Fevig, and herself, to begin discussing the collection within the context of its community of origin. Together, these women knew a tremendous amount about their community history, and they candidly and movingly shared their thoughts and feelings on the materials Blackwood collected, the place of those materials within Ojibwe history, and their meanings to Ojibwe people today.

Goldie Sigana Johnson's experiences were the key to beginning to understand Ojibwe meanings of this material. She had just begun school in the autumn of 1925, barely two months before Blackwood's visit to the Cross Lake Indian Boarding School in Ponemah. Like many Ojibwe children, she spoke no English when she arrived at school, and in accordance with school policy at the time was not permitted to speak Ojibwe. Her older sister attempted to prepare her for this by teaching her to recognize the English phrase, "What is your name?" and to respond, in English, "My name is Julia." When the school

principal asked her this and she proudly told him, however, he replied, “I think we have too many Julias in school this year. I think we’ll call you Goldie.” The childlike drawing that she did for Blackwood that autumn is labelled in the teacher’s handwriting, “Goldie Sigana.” Her hair sample (1994.15.1073) bears the label, “Goldie Sigana, age 6, Primer Class, Female.”

The assimilative intent and traumatic effects of schools for Native American children have been well documented.[14] Mrs. Johnson’s experience of having even her name taken from her is part of the Ojibwe histories of Blackwood’s collection, a completely different set of meanings than Blackwood intended for them. That the samples were obtained at schools for Native children also evokes the deliberate cutting of children’s hair by officials as part of traumatic entry rituals designed to separate the children from what was thought to be their contaminating traditional culture and to mark the children’s entry into civilized, middle-class dominant society culture. Photographs were often taken of children “before” and “after” their first term at school to emphasize this transition.These traumatic transitional rituals are remembered in Native communities with great anger, and their purpose, of deliberate and forceful assimilation and humiliation, was and is clearly understood. During our discussion of the samples from Red Lake, Mrs. Johnson noted that none of the samples is from boys, possibly because their heads would have been shaved when they entered school in the autumn and their hair would not have been long enough for Blackwood to obtain samples. The girls’ hair was bobbed when they entered, leaving enough for samples to be taken.

That Blackwood had obtained the Red Lake hair samples in the coercive and deliberately assimilative environment of the school gave them, from the perspective of Ojibwe people today, a powerful set of negative connotations. Even in the indirect form of photographs of the envelopes they are in and lists of names and data on the envelopes, the hair was interpreted by people at Red Lake as part of a tradition of forcible interventions on Ojibwe people by White outsiders. While these are scientific samples intended by Blackwood and her anthropological colleagues to provide data about "race," they are also documents which tell us much about cross-cultural relations and about early 20th century Ojibwe life.

That they had been collected at all gave them another set of meanings, given the Ojibwe belief that hair can be used magically to harm or control the person from whom it comes. This is a well-documented element of Ojibwe belief, still held by many tribal members, and combined with the physical and political distance between the community and the hair caused unease in Ojibwe with whom I spoke about the samples: who in Red Lake knows how the samples might be used? That the samples had, in keeping with good museum practise, been meticulously labelled with the names of the people from whom they came, and were held in an overseas museum in a university which is a world centre for scientific research, reinforced this unease. And not without cause: about the time I began working on this collection, an Oxford researcher made a request to do a tiny but destructive analysis (and one that is, in scientific terms, entirely legitimate) on some of the hair, and had no plans to contact the source community to obtain permission to do so. Her request was refused, pending discussions with the community. "Magical harm" may

occur in more than one form, and the cultural and scientific arrogance involved in the continuation, for research purposes, of the historical practise of White people taking Native hair without permission and for non-Ojibwe goals, equates well with traditional Ojibwe concepts of the damage one can do to another using such intimate bodily parts.

The hair samples are enmeshed in a final, but very powerful, set of problematic associations, for hair has had a peculiarly political role in Minnesota Ojibwe history. Blackwood's collection of hair samples, together with her measuring of physical features and records of genealogy, resonates with other scholars' use of hair, other physical features, and genealogy to determine who in Ojibwe communities was a "full blood," who was a "mixed blood," and–on that basis–who was entitled to sell tribal lands and timber.

Racial categorization was used against Native American peoples in the late nineteenth and early twentiety centuries by making "full-blood" Indians wards of the federal government. Based on folk concepts of blood and race–and linked to assumptions about the relative competence, intelligence, and "civilization" of lighter- and darker-skinned peoples–US federal policy deemed Native peoples inherently inferior, less intelligent, and less competent than Whites (and see Beaulieu 1984:289). On this basis, a Minnesota State Act of 1906[15] permitted mixed-blood people to lease or sell their lands or timber upon reservation lands; full-bloods, who were deemed legally incompetent, were forbidden to do so. This became more of a problem at certain reservations (notably White Earth) than others, but across Minnesota resulted in an enormous amount of fraud, with

White entrepreneurs encouraging mixed-bloods (or those who claimed to be) to sell or lease, and some full-bloods taking advantage of the opportunity to make money. That many families encompassed both “full-blood” and “mixed-blood” people, and that the Ojibwe used lifestyle and culture rather than physical traits to classify individuals, further complicated the situation (Beaulieu 1984:288)–as did the lack of an official definition for “mixed blood” within the Bureau of Indian Affairs. By 1909, 90 per cent of the lands at White Earth which had been formerly allotted to full-bloods had been sold or mortgaged (Meyer 1994:160). Finally, state officials stepped in to attempt to remedy the situation, sparking a series of enquiries which continued throughout the time of Blackwood’s visit to Minnesota.

And here the strand of one history crosses over others. To sort out the rights and wrongs of what had occurred, government officials hired physical anthropologists to assist them in defining “full” and “mixed-blood” people and to determine whether particular transactions had been fraudulent—and Ojibwe hair became an important diagnostic test in these analyses. In 1914, Ales Hrdlicka, curator of physical anthropology at the Smithsonian, was hired to attempt a scientific definition and test of blood quantum for “full blood” and “mixed blood” Ojibwe (Beaulieu 1984:293; Meyer 1994: 168). The following year, Albert E. Jenks, professor of anthropology at the University of Minnesota, was also hired to work on such a definition. Facial shape, cranial measurements, and skin colour, but especially hair colour and texture (lighter and curlier, it was believed, for mixed-blood, and darker and straighter for full-blood), became

important markers of "blood mixture" in these enquiries, as they did at that time within physical anthropology generally.

Jenks' involvement in these cases links them to Blackwood's work in the region, for it was Jenks who, in October 1925, gave Blackwood what she called her "marching orders" for her trip through Ojibwe communities in Minnesota. Presumably, when she talked with him on two occasions that month, Jenks spoke to Blackwood about his attempts to determine "race" through physical measurement, but apart from a glancing comment reported from their conversation about the White Earth community being very "mixed," she does not mention this in her notes.[16] The rapid nature of her work in Minnesota, which lasted just 20 days (30 October to 19 November 1925), may have caused Blackwood to have been uncharacteristically oblivious to the political context in which she obtained hair samples and skin colour measurements at Red Lake. She mentions nothing about the ongoing classification controversy in her notes, and cites neither Jenks' nor Hrdlicka's publications in her monograph on mental testing which resulted from this fieldwork.[17] Rather amazingly, only a few women at Nett Lake refused to permit Blackwood to measure them ("one said if I measured her I should be able to arrest her," possibly referring to the land sales), while the Indian Agent at Nett Lake "was surprised at the people who had allowed me to measure them," and at Red Lake, when she "went round the village measuring," Blackwood noted, "Most people willing to be measured" (Blackwood diary 1924-27, 2, 3 14 November 1925).

While physical anthropologists became involved in these cases in an attempt to rectify the fraudulent dispossession of lands from Minnesota Ojibwe, their work further divided the Ojibwe community, sometimes causing painful disputes when siblings were classified differently (Meyer 1994:171). Their work is not remembered in a positive light by the Ojibwe, but is seen as part of a series of interventions by the dominant society which led to (or failed to prevent) the alienation of traditional lands and resources, and the continued imposition of racialized categories which remain a problematic feature of Native American life today. Similarly, from an Ojibwe perspective, Blackwood's asking for, obtaining, labelling, and classifying hair samples were political acts linked to the imposition of dominant-society power to define and limit Ojibwe people. From the perspective of current theory on material culture, the collection and assignment of meaning to these samples suggests much about the nature of relations and the dynamics of power at that time between the Ojibwe and the dominant society.

Museum artefacts do not shed these tensions once they enter the museum, no matter how long they sit in quiet corners. If objects continue to be vital to their communities of origin, if the histories in which they are entangled continue to affect the present, then consulting source communities about such materials means facing these histories and tensions. It does not always mean that these tensions can be reconciled through the process of consultation. Given the entanglement of hair, culture, race, classification, and painful history, it is not the least bit surprising that when I went to talk to people at Red Lake, the hair samples proved to be a barrier to talking about the rest of Blackwood's collection from the area, or about possibilities for collaborative work. News that the

samples existed and were held in a foreign museum evoked distressed responses from everyone with whom I spoke at Red Lake. During our interview with Goldie Johnson, I asked her how she would like the sample of hair that Blackwood obtained from her to be treated. Would she permit it to be tested for any reason, and if so what procedure did she think should be followed to notify her? Should her name and other information recorded on the envelope be entered into the museum database? What did she think about the possibility of showing photographs of the hair sample envelopes as part of an exhibition about the collection? Her responses, in light of the meanings and role of hair in the context of Ojibwe history, were not surprising: she said that while she was alive she did not want the sample either tested or exhibited, and was uncomfortable with personal data being added to a museum database. Mrs. Fevig, asked how she thought the hair should be dealt with, gave an equally direct response: “Give back what was taken,” she said. And while Mrs. Johnson was extremely polite to me, and expressed gratitude for my coming to consult on the matter, she later expressed concern about Blackwood’s purpose and the location of the hair samples in Oxford. It was as if seeing the drawing and the image of the envelopes with the hair samples, and talking about them, had brought to the surface memories of difficult experiences at the school which had been submerged for decades, and it seemed that the longer she thought about things, the less comfortable she became with them.

Mrs. Johnson’s comments, and those of Mrs. Fevig and Jody Beaulieu, suggested that my idea of having a collaborative exhibition was not viable, no matter how educational it might be for UK or Ojibwe audiences: displaying publicly something as sensitive as the

hair samples was inappropriate. Indeed, the idea of explaining the continuing meanings of the materials in the collection to non-Ojibwe people was dismissed by them as irrelevant. Clearly, in community contexts, it was community needs which were being pursued, and these focused on retrieving information, photographs, and ultimately artefacts for care within the community.

This was, at the outset, a preliminary trip to take back photographs and information to source communities and to explore possibilities for further research. While I left the door open for projects which might arise from Blackwood's collection, over a year later, no-one from Red Lake has been in further contact with me. At one level, this is not surprising. Successful research partnerships with Native American communities require long-term relationships, and quick reconnaissance trips are unlikely to produce much fruit. Beyond this, though, what I encountered was the legacy of the past, made glaringly problematic by my attempt to reconcile different meanings attached to the same artefacts. Blackwood's collection of the hair samples, and their relocation to the PRM, evokes for some Ojibwe people the pain and anger caused by their experience of colonialism. This is not an easy thing to face, either for the Ojibwe or for the staff of the Museum. While the Red Lake people with whom I met thanked me many times for telling them about the collection and coming to ask them about it, given the nature of the material, I was not exactly the bearer of good news. Since criticism of the past can be articulated towards contemporary representatives of an institution (as I have found with indigenous visitors to the PRM), and since criticism is never supposed to be expressed directly in Ojibwe culture, it is also possible that the silence from Red Lake is a form of criticism of

Blackwood's actions in the past. I hope it is also a reflective pause before further communication and action.

Museum staff are rightly exhorted to consult with source communities over the meanings and care of artefacts, and to include community perspectives and voices in exhibitions. The benefits of these processes, and of the relations forged by them, can be significant. On the other hand, consultation over historic collections can raise challenging and emotive issues for both the source community and the museum. Scholars may write of artefacts as nexuses of social relations, and may use them to retrace social and political relations involved in their collecting, but need also to consider the legacy of these dynamics in the present: depending on the object and its history, some of those relations can be very difficult, and may involve being called to account for the past. Some of those pasts, and the relations which constituted them, may be so problematic that they continue to create problematic relations in the present when contact is re-established between museums and source communities. And while artefacts continue to acquire layers of meaning along with each stage in their histories, these layers can form barriers to creating new relations. To some extent, what those layers consist of is the parallel, and very different, histories and experiences of indigenous and dominant societies. These can be brought together in the process of consultation, but not easily reconciled.

I hope to return to Red Lake and over time to build a relationship with community members which will permit productive research. When I do return, it will be in the knowledge that some of the strands of the past cannot be braided together, and that some

artefacts must be left out of any attempt to do so. The materials produced for the tourist trade which Blackwood collected, as well as the photographs, might well be a less difficult platform for further work, and might facilitate an exhibition which could meet community goals as well as the PRM's desire for further information and Ojibwe perspectives on the collections. On the basis of this initial encounter, however, I suspect that such work will be impossible before the hair samples are dealt with to the satisfaction of the people of Red Lake—which will probably mean their repatriation and destruction. Even then, without the hair samples themselves, there will still be accretions of meanings and histories to deal with, although without the core of this particular tangle of social relations it might be possible to tease out the strands of meaning into some more productive pattern. Despite the difficulties of confronting the emotive histories surrounding the hair samples, though, this has been a worthwhile project, and I hope that other UK museums will embrace the idea that consultation is necessary, especially where there are ethical problems related to particular collections.

This work has also led to productive reflection on the hair samples. Like other forms of human remains, the hair samples in Blackwood's collection are extensions of the individuals from whom they originate. Even if they were not so meticulously labelled, even if I had not been able to meet Mrs. Johnson, this would still be true. Hair, fingernails, blood samples, and other "replaceable" human remains tend to be treated by some scientists as less significant than bones or organs, but clearly, in this case, the people from whom the hair was taken would not make such a distinction. And if hair is an extension of the individual, if its manipulation expresses social identity, if the cutting

and analysis of Ojibwe hair has been so rooted in relations of cross-cultural power as it has been, then we as museum professionals need to take very seriously the implications of retaining, storing, displaying, or giving permission for testing such materials. The problematic dynamics surrounding these samples stem from the transformation of the hair from the very personal to the externally controlled, from person to museum object. Even where personal data is known for such samples, museums and scientific collections have often thought of such information as less important than the physical elements of the samples, what they can be made to tell us through scientific research. The way to begin addressing the tensions surrounding such collections is, I think, to acknowledge that in fact they never stop being personal, being persons, and that the job of the researcher or institution is both to understand such materials as data and to acknowledge them as persons by consulting with the individuals and the communities from which they originate. The process is difficult on many levels, but if we acknowledge that we are dealing with human beings represented in our collections, then it becomes both imperative and productive to interact with those human beings (and their descendants), and to reactivate the relations surrounding collections. Hopefully, by doing so, we will be able to forge more positive relationships in the future.

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Endnotes

[1] Recent literature on collecting has taken several strands of enquiry. One of these explores particular collectors, focusing on intellectual motivations influencing the content of collections, and on the particular nature of the colonial context within which ethnographic collecting occurred (eg. O'Hanlon and Welsch 2000). Literature has also focused on dynamics within source communities collected from: on indigenous agency in making items available (or not), on the local histories which lay behind the decision by indigenous peoples to sell artefacts, and on the ongoing need for and meanings of collected artefacts within indigenous communities (eg. Brown 2000; Cole 1995[1985]). These studies have together produced fine-grained materials to understand the shifting contexts and meanings of objects, but with a few notable exceptions still often seem to be parallel histories: some focusing on collectors, some on the collected. This seems a shame, for the collections themselves once linked these disparate peoples—and, of course, are doing so again. Thomas (1991), Gosden and Knowles (2001), and some of the work exploring the "biographies" of objects (eg. Kopytoff 1988) provide important and stimulating analyses of artefacts as links between peoples, eras, and histories.

[2] The Ojibwe, an Algonquian-speaking people, still inhabit their historic territories around the Great Lakes and west onto the prairies, in Canada and the US. They call themselves in their own language *Anishinaabeg*, and have been known by the names Ojibwa, Chippewa, Chippeway, and Saulteaux.

[3] I am indebted to Chantal Knowles for sharing her research on Blackwood's career at Oxford; see Knowles 2000 and Gosden and Knowles 2001, chapter 7.

[4] There may have been a technical factor relating to Blackwood's decision to not use the hair samples. Just before she went to the Minnesota Ojibwe communities, Blackwood took samples she already had to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, where she worked with the "color analyser," presumably a device similar to the skin colour wheel she used in the field. She found the hair colour analyser "not very successful as not enough light is reflected from the hair," and may have felt that the difficulty in categorizing the hair samples by colour made them too problematic to use [Blackwood Field diary 1924-27, 22 October 1925]. One senses in her monograph, however, that she was also disenchanted with the broader framework of analysis involved in this research.

[5] I am grateful to PRM volunteer Ina van der Veen, who tackled the painstaking task of correlating the names attached to the hair samples and drawings in order to demonstrate this important point.

[6] Photographs taken at Ponemah, November 1925 (accession numbers PRM BB.A.5. 40-60).

[7] An AHRB-funded project exploring the local and cross-cultural meanings of Blackwood's photographs began in summer 2001 involving PRM staff, including Peers, project researcher Alison Brown, and the Kainai Nation or Blood Tribe of Alberta.

[8] The scroll is simplistic, and may be a model of a real scroll (Marcia Anderson, personal communication, 1999).

[9] Laura Peers, "Staking Claims: "Cultural Property," Native American Peoples, and the Heritage Profession." Paper presented to the Association for Social Anthropology Meeting 2001, Brighton, UK.

[10] This is implicit in research partnerships between museums and indigenous peoples, although it is a premise which sits uneasily with the agendas of museums and funding bodies, which tend to think first of what museums can gain from consultation with source communities.

[11] I base these observations on my experience of escorting Native American people around the museum as part of my work, and on comments made by PRM staff members on other indigenous visitors to the museum.

[12] At her request, conservators removed plastic wrap (used to minimize insect infestations) from Ojibwe artefacts and replaced this with acid-free tissue so that artefacts (potentially animate in Ojibwe cosmology) could "breathe." Later, following advice from Paiz and Beaulieu, PRM staff removed the water drum from display and placed it in a quiet corner of the storeroom.

[13] On the same trip, Anderson and I also visited another Minnesota Ojibwe community, Nett Lake, where Blackwood had taken photographs, and returned copies of those images to the community.

[14] See, for instance, Child 1998, Miller 1996.

[15] This was the Clapp Act, amended in 1907. Jenks mentions the Act, the subsequent land sale fraud, and his involvement in the ensuing court cases in Jenks 1916:v. See also Meyer 1994, Beaulieu 1984.

[16] The two field diary entries relating to her conversations with Jenks say simply, "(13 October 1925, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota) Talked to Dr Jenks, Professor of Anthropology, who schemed out a trip for me to Indian Reservations. The one where there is most mixture is at White Earth...Another, the Turtle Mountain Reserve...a good

place to study the amalgamation process" and "(20 October 1925) Saw Dr Jenks and got my marching orders for the Indian trip."

[17] In her teaching papers (BB B12.12 Physical Anthropology notes), which date from after the 1924-27 trip, Blackwood had notes from her readings and fieldwork comparing blood quantum with physical measurements and with eye and skin colour. One of these notes compares her findings with those of Professor Jenks from his work with a number of Minnesota Ojibwe communities (Jenks 1916). There is no reference to this work in her field diary or materials directly related to the 1924-27 trip, however.