

An Anthropological Theory of Dispossession

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Abstract

There is a vast body of literature exploring human remains and the body in museums, which primarily considers the political role of human remains and their connection to historical racial sciences. While these fields of literature are important, this dissertation instead holds up similar questions about human remains but against a different body of literature. Instead, this work considers how anthropological academic theory impacts museological practices and contributes to both tangible and intangible forms of dispossession.

To answer this research question, this work explores three case studies which each centre around a return made from the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) in Oxford. In each case, I look at the story of the return and consider what has been taken away, diminished, negated, or made to disappear. The focus here is on what is subtracted – information removed as a tangible manifestation of intangible dispossession. By examining omissions in archival records, this dissertation creates a typology of redactions to further our understanding of how museological archives exclude information that can humanise the remains in collections while distancing institutions and collectors from extractive violence. This typology of redactions leads to the conclusion that re/humanisation through counter-forensics is impossible because of the fragmented nature of museum archives and considers how this affects our ability to use tactics such as removal from display in order to address unprovenanced human remains in collections, which form the majority of museological collections.

Finally, this work suggests that if the archive is broken, then so too is the anthropological voice, concluding that new creative and literary methodologies are needed to confront

dispossession and human remains in museological collections. Ultimately, this suggested focus on storytelling is not a departure from anthropological tradition, as the four fields approach sees the discipline of anthropology as a compilation of archaeology, physical anthropology, cultural anthropology and linguistics. At the crux of this lies linguistics. In this sense, this dissertation suggests a revisiting creative forms of writing history and a reorientation of anthropological theory. Rather than a disciplinary rejection, this work suggests a pyro-epistemological controlled burn of the field which looks back to early anthropological literature on gift-giving and material exchange from Malinowski and Mauss in order to highlight the implications of Mauss' obligations of reciprocity and debt in material exchange, which are ideas that lie at the heart of cultural restitution.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation explores dispossession, examining how it manifests within the archive and how anthropological theory can also enable processes of dispossession. By analyzing the ways in which historical records and archival practices contribute to the erasure or marginalization of certain voices, the study highlights the mechanisms through which dispossession is perpetuated. Additionally, it interrogates how anthropological frameworks can themselves facilitate dispossession by reinforcing power dynamics and narratives that exclude or misrepresent marginalized communities. Through this dual focus on the archive and anthropological theory, the dissertation seeks to reveal and challenge the underlying structures that sustain both intangible and tangible dispossession.

In order to explore this idea, this dissertation examines the gaps in the archive, viewing them as tangible manifestations of dispossession. By focusing on what is excluded from historical narratives constructed from these archives, it highlights how certain voices and experiences are systematically erased or marginalized. The study also critiques anthropological theory, suggesting that it often obscures our understanding of past events by reinforcing selective narratives and power dynamics. Through this examination, the dissertation seeks to uncover the ways in which both archival practices and anthropological frameworks contribute to a partial and sometimes misleading portrayal of history, ultimately reinforcing the dispossession of certain groups and perspectives.

This dissertation contributes to our understanding of how our structures function to enact dispossession and influence returns by examining three case studies of restitution at the

Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) at the University of Oxford. This work identifies how dispossession in both archive and theory impact returns and argue that this dispossession can be better understood by reorienting anthropological material culture theories. It proposes an approach to restitution wherein theory is applied to enable deeper understanding of dispossession in regards to museological collections. Therefore, the main contributions of this work are to guide the reader through understanding that the archive is broken, a new type of anthropological language and voice is needed, and that anthropological theory can be reinvented in its own tradition. Specifically, this work has offered up anthropological theory in a new light. It argues for a counter-counter paradigm, in which we become comfortable with questions and speculation, acknowledging that the archive is broken.

This research shows that our current anthropological theories struggle to further our understanding of restitution, but also suggests that our theory can be reoriented to account for historical power dynamics and offer new routes towards understanding and discussing returns. In Stephen Jay Gould's book *The Mismeasure of Man*, Gould ends with what he calls "A Positive Conclusion." Gould quotes Walt Whitman, who advised readers to "make much of negatives" (1996: 351). In this vein, Gould argues that debunking is a positive science, saying that "scientists do not debunk only to cleanse and purge. They refute older ideas *in the light of* a different view about the nature of things" (1996: 352). In a similar way, I argue that my critique of anthropological theory is positive because it suggests alternate methods for aligning anthropology with museological restitution.

The first case study explores the very first PRM return from the museum to Australia in 1990. The second case study examines a return to Hawaii which is currently in progress.

The final case study focuses on the human remains at the PRM which are likely to be impossible to return under contemporary structures. This last case study is therefore about a hypothetical return; while the earlier chapters looked at the very first return and a current PRM return, this chapter examines a return that will never occur. These movements build upon themselves in order to illuminate how these dehumanizing occlusions and black holes are critical to consider in any sort of theory which attempts to grapple with dispossession or returns. The final chapter concludes with a discussion of a new type of anthropological theory, one that repurposes and reconsiders how we use theory and anthropological voice to consider human remains in museums.

1.2 Dissertation Sur Le Don

I began this work at Oxford in the department of Archaeology in 2019. While the inclusion of the term “anthropology” in the title of this dissertation may appear unexpected because this doctoral dissertation is submitted within the field of Archaeology. I would like to clarify that this work is an archaeological approach to anthropology. Anthropological material culture theory might be seen as a process by which knowledge is ordered, but archaeology is a study of duration and what survives. In this sense, I am studying how things were built and were built to last. How was anthropology as a tool of colonialism built and built to endure? In this instance, this work interrogates the narratives of empire that are inscribed in the multiple texts of the museum and how they self-perpetuate. This is a dissertation about anthropology written in the department of archaeology, but the archive is not another archaeological site. The archive is a construction that has been curated. While archaeological sites are representations, the archive is perhaps better seen as a misrepresentation (Stoler 2009). Neither site is a ready-made, fully comprehensible entity, both sites necessitate a specific approach to unravel its meaning and significance.

In this sense, this work looks at anthropology from the archaeological perspective. In the first month of reading for my doctorate at Oxford, my supervisor and I sat in his office at the Pitt Rivers Museum. I was planning to research material culture and returns but I was formally trained in classics, museum studies, and archaeology, and knew little about anthropology. As such, we spent a lot of time talking about the discipline generally. We started an Anthropology 101 crash course and discussed gifts and obligations to give and receive, as the history of the discipline of anthropology relies heavily on these theories of gift-giving. One day, he held out a pen, which I reached to grab. I extended my hand out to accept the pen instinctively and without question. We laughed a little over how quickly I had reached out to accept the pen he offered; I also gave the pen back immediately, before he had even asked for its return. The example had worked. I already intimately understood the responsibilities of gift-giving and the obligation to return.

I read *Essay on the Gift*, however, my research intended to look at cultural restitution of colonially acquired materials in museums. What role did a framework of gifts play for me as a researcher looking at materials in the Pitt Rivers Museum? For almost a century now, the dominant school of thought in museums of the Global North has followed an anthropological theory of gift-giving. Bronisław Malinowski, who is considered by many to be one of the most influential writers in the discipline of anthropology, wrote *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* in 1922 about customs of gift-giving in the Pacific, detailing the specific rules surrounding giving and receiving in the Kula ring. Building on this, Marcel Mauss then wrote *Essai Sur Le Don*, or *The Essay on the Gift*, about gift-giving systems in the Pacific and examining the deeper ideas of reciprocity

and debt (1925). Since then, anthropology has continued to focus on understanding gift-giving systems of material culture using ethnographic materials in museums.

Of course, there is tension here as the ethnographic materials in use at museums were not given as gifts at all, but instead often violently stolen, coerced, and thieved. Despite Mauss' lengthy discussions of proper methods of exchanging materials and objects, there are no mentions of the physical location of the objects he is studying. Anthropology gives museum researchers a language and theory of gift-giving with which to understand things which have been *taken*. This is, of course, insufficient for acknowledging stealing, looting, grave-digging, coercion, and systemic dispossession. Currently, the language surrounding colonial spoliation is insufficient to properly discuss material exchange under duress and in unbalanced power systems. With many collections acquired in a colonial context, to refer to materials as stolen or as loot is more accurate. However, this language continues to be insufficient for most people as most of these museum collections are legally acquired or purchased despite their extremely violent histories. It is difficult to call an object stolen if it was legally bought by a museum auction. In August 2020, a British news article stated, "The British Museum's 'loot' was bought and paid for" and that "director Hartwig Fischer said it was a 'simplification' to treat the collection as a hoard of stolen goods" (Simpson 2020). To a certain extent this is true, as our current language of "stolen loot" is woefully deficient to fully comprehend the power dynamics of a gift from colonized to colonizer.

Returning to Maussian theory, what are the implications of applying these anthropological obligations of reciprocity and debt to material exchange for museums? Especially given that ideas of reciprocity and debt are truly the heart of restitution. Foregrounding the dominant ideas of *the Gift*, this research instead considers restitution

of Pacific materials currently in the Pitt Rivers Museum through debt and reciprocity, as movements which tell a greater story of Indigenous human rights. In this way, this research is foregrounding the ideas of *The Gift* in order to ask historical questions about it.

Instead, I propose an anthropological theory of dispossession; this work contributes to anthropological language and theory in order to better understand restitution, arguing that anthropological material culture theory can be reoriented to grapple with dispossession and returns. To understand dispossession and restitution, this dissertation confronts the role of anthropology and the archive in the way we construct knowledge. This writing intervenes to make visible those gaps in histories of museum returns in order to create an anthropological theory of dispossession and to consider the implications of Mauss' obligations of reciprocity and debt in material exchange, which are ideas that lie at the heart of cultural restitution.

Foregrounding these dominant anthropological ideas of gift and exchange, this research instead considers dispossession by recording archival conversations around museological returns as movements, which tell a greater story of Indigenous human rights. Given that the focus of many of these anthropological theories focused on Pacific examples, this research also focuses on materials from the Pacific and traces both debt and reciprocity for a fuller understanding of both dispossession and conversely, restitution. The primary focus of this research therefore asks: how does dispossession influence our understanding of the return of artifacts and human remains in museums? It investigates how gaps in the archive and the emphasis on anthropological theories such as gift-giving shape the processes and perceptions of these returns. By examining these gaps and theoretical biases, the study seeks to reveal how they affect our conceptions of

human remains in museum contexts and how they inform the ethics and practices surrounding their restitution. Ultimately, this research aims to shed light on the ways in which dispossession and selective theoretical frameworks impact both the narrative and practical approaches to museum collections.

The following chapter therefore provides a research context, outlining tangible and intangible forms of dispossession in anthropology and museums before considering how restitution confronts these forms of dispossession. The next chapter outlines the approach to addressing the issue of dispossession in museums. Then, the primary contribution of the first case study in Chapter Four lies in its typology of redactions, which lays the foundation for the subsequent case studies. This initial case study demonstrates how the absence of information hinders restitution efforts, revealing that this informational gap is inherently tied to the institutional structures themselves. Building on this insight, the second case study questions whether this lack of information can legitimately justify the refusal of returns. Finally, the third case study explores the informational void more directly, examining how anthropology's theoretical and linguistic frameworks might approach the absence of information from a fresh perspective.

Chapter 2: Research Context

The structure of this chapter begins by describing Mauss' *Essay on the Gift* and its profound impact on anthropological theory and museum practices, underscoring the Pacific concentration of anthropological theory stemming from Mauss and providing an intellectual genealogy. Subsequently, this chapter contextualizes the development of Mauss' ideas within the French colonial milieu in which Mauss wrote the essay and obtained materials, before detailing how anthropology was more generally historically connected to colonialism and extraction. The chapter proceeds to position this anthropological extraction through concepts like accumulation-by-dispossession and debt, then explores the concept of restitution as a countermeasure to that historic extractivism. Lastly, it concludes with a discussion on how restitution can influence disciplinary theory and explains how these Maussian theories can alter our conceptualizations of returns.

2.1 Human Remains in Museums

There is a vast body of literature exploring human remains and the body in museums. Much of this literature considers the role of human remains and their connection to racial sciences. These racial sciences were a set of pseudo-scientific theories and practices that emerged in the 1850s, which attempted to classify and rank human races based on perceived biological, physical, and intellectual differences. These theories were often rooted in notions of white superiority and used to justify racial discrimination, segregation, and eugenics policies. For physical anthropology, this meant the measurement of skull sizes, facial angles, and other physical traits to categorize people into different races. They claimed that these physical characteristics correlated with intellectual and moral qualities. These fields focused on the measurement of skulls

(craniometry) and the study of bumps on the skull (phrenology) to draw conclusions about racial differences in intelligence and character.

A significant portion of this literature examines the role of human remains and their connection to racial sciences. For example, Samuel Redman has explored the North American context of human remains in *Bone Rooms: From Scientific Racism to Human Prehistory in Museums*. In this 2016 book, Redman explores the history of collecting human remains for scientific study. Redman argues that the motivations behind the collection of human bones were often tied to racist ideologies and colonialism. He examines how these collections were used to justify notions of racial superiority and how they contributed to the development of scientific racism. Redman also highlights the ethical dilemmas surrounding the display and study of human remains in museums and ultimately his book serves as a critique of the ways in which science has been used to perpetuate oppressive systems.

Similarly, Stephen Jay Gould considered the fallacy of racial sciences in *The Mismeasure of Man*. In his 1981 book, Gould critiques the historical and scientific roots of intelligence testing and the concept of biological determinism. Gould examines the flawed methodologies and biases that have influenced the development and interpretation of IQ tests, as well as the broader implications of using these tests to measure intelligence and make social judgments. *The Mismeasure of Man* documents the dangers of using flawed scientific theories to justify social hierarchies and calls for a rejection of deterministic views that undermine individual dignity and human rights. These two works by Redman and Gould both document how human remains in museums were used to advance racial sciences and narratives of colonial supremacy.

Literature investigating museums and their inclusion of human remains often centers on their role in the creation of inhumanity and racism. For example, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead* from 2010 by Ann Fabian is a historical exploration of the collection and study of human skulls in the United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Fabian traces the origins of skull collection to the rise of racial science and theories of racial superiority. She explores how scientists and collectors used skulls to support their racist ideologies, arguing that certain races were inherently inferior or superior based on physical measurements and characteristics. Further, Alice Conklin's 2013 book *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850–1950* explores the intersection of race, anthropology, and imperialism in France during the 19th and 20th centuries. Conklin illustrates how ideas of racial hierarchy and cultural evolution influenced colonial expansion and administration and discusses the contributions of prominent anthropologists such as Paul Broca and Georges Vacher de Lapouge to the development of racial theories and their implications for French colonial policy. Conklin also discusses the Musée de l'Homme in the early 20th century as a center for anthropological research and education, examining how the museum's collections and exhibitions served as tools of colonial propaganda, promoting French cultural and racial superiority while exoticizing and othering colonized peoples.

Furthermore, in *A Traffic in Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* from 2002, Michael Sappol examines the historical practices surrounding the procurement, use, and display of human remains in 19th-century America. Sappol explores museological body procurement, dissection, and anatomical exhibitions, revealing how the trade in human bodies intersected with broader social, cultural, and political issues of the time. He explores how anatomical collections were used for medical education, public spectacle, and scientific research,

shedding light on the ways in which these practices reinforced racial hierarchies, perpetuated dehumanization, and contributed to the objectification of marginalized groups. In Helen MacDonald's book *Human Remains: Dissection and Its Histories*, MacDonald examines the intricate history of human remains and their role in museums. MacDonald explores how museums have collected, displayed, and interpreted human remains throughout history, shedding light on the cultural, ethical, and scientific dimensions of these practices. MacDonald's analysis offers insight into how museums have shaped public perceptions of human remains and explores how the procurement, study, and exhibition of human remains have been intertwined with broader issues of power, identity, and representation.

These historical and political issues regarding human remains in museums have also been explored in *Mummified: The Stories Behind Egyptian Mummies in Museums* by Angela Stienne. Stienne's 2022 book investigates the presence of Egyptian mummies in museum collections. Stienne provides readers with a comprehensive overview of the process of mummification in ancient Egypt, offering insights into how and why these mummies came to be preserved and displayed in museums around the world. Stienne traces the journey of Egyptian mummies from excavation to display in museum galleries, discussing the ethical considerations surrounding the display and conservation of human remains, as well as the challenges and controversies that museums face in presenting Egyptian mummies to the public. Most importantly, she provides insights into how Egyptian material culture was used to create biological racism when they were historically racialized and, in particular, how they were often positioned as "white" within the context of Western museums. Stienne highlights how early Egyptologists and museum curators, largely influenced by European imperialist ideologies, often presented ancient Egyptians as part of a "white" or European lineage. This approach was used to

justify Western claims to Egyptian heritage, disconnecting Egypt from its African roots and placing it within a European or Mediterranean framework. By doing so, museums perpetuated racial hierarchies and reinforced a Eurocentric worldview that downplayed Egypt's African identity. Stienne also discusses the use of physical anthropology and pseudoscientific methods to categorize mummies and other ancient remains according to racial typologies, often emphasizing traits that aligned with European features. These practices reflected broader racial politics and colonial power structures, which sought to claim the cultural achievements of ancient Egypt as part of Western heritage. Finally, *Constructing Race: The Science of Bodies and Cultures in American Anthropology* by Tracy Teslow in 2014 provides a historical overview of the emergence of racial science in the United States, as anthropologists sought to classify and categorize human populations based on physical characteristics, cultural practices, and perceived racial hierarchies. Teslow discusses how early anthropologists such as Franz Boas challenged the prevailing racial theories of the time, advocating for cultural relativism and rejecting biological determinism and contextualizing the role of American anthropology in shaping colonial policies and practices. These works explore how human remains in collections are involved in broader discussions concerning colonialism, race and identity. However, these works generally investigate human remains through the lens of the politics of scientific and biological racism.

While these fields of literature are important, this dissertation instead holds up similar questions about human remains but against a different body of literature. Instead, this work considers how anthropological theory has affected museological human remains and their returns. As such, this dissertation instead considers the role of Mauss and anthropological theory for human remains in museums. Therefore this chapter mainly

describes the anthropological literature used to provide the context and background for this dissertation.

2.2 Essay on the Gift

This dissertation explores questions concerning human remains within museum collections against an anthropological body of literature. As such, this work focuses heavily on Marcel Mauss because of his weighty contributions to anthropology. Given his contributions to the way anthropology conceptualizes material exchange, materials, and debt, by examining Mauss' theories, particularly his insights into gift-exchange and social reciprocity, this dissertation seeks to understand the cultural and ethical dimensions of human remains in museums. Mauss' concept of the "gift" provides a crucial framework for analyzing how human remains in museums are not objects but subjects which carry significant social, cultural, and moral implications. Consequently, this work places a strong emphasis on Mauss to illuminate the complex relationships between museums, the communities from which the remains originate, and the broader anthropological discourse. This section will therefore consider Mauss' work, its influence on anthropological theory, and museum practice.

Mauss' 1925 *Essai sur le don*, or *Essay on the Gift*, built on Malinowski's ethnographic studies in the Pacific to explore the obligation of reciprocity in material exchanges. Malinowski had conducted extensive fieldwork to document the intricate economic and social structures of the Trobriand Islanders in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, emphasizing the importance of the Kula exchange, in which ceremonial shell valuables circulate in intricate patterns between islands. Mauss built on Malinowski's work to argue that gift-giving is not simply an exchange of commodities, but rather a complex social phenomenon that creates bonds of reciprocity and solidarity between individuals and

groups. Mauss' work is short, starting with an outline of three essential obligations inherent in gift-giving: the act of giving, receiving, and reciprocating. Mauss argues that these reciprocal actions create a complex web of social ties and obligations, contributing to the maintenance of social order. He contends that gifts are not mere economic transactions and that they carry symbolic meaning and contribute to the prestige of the giver within the community. He outlines the obligation to give, receive, and reciprocate in a wide variety of examples, ranging from the Haida potlatch to finding connections in Roman or Hindu laws. Mauss also contrasts gift-exchange in traditional societies with market economies, asserting that even in modern contexts, gifts serve as more than economic transactions. Gifts and exchange play a crucial role in structuring societies, influencing social hierarchies, and fostering alliances. Most important to this work is the positioning of a refusal to reciprocate as a source of potential social tension. The *Essay on the Gift* then concludes with a wider reflection on the implications of these obligations.

Certainly, there are many useful concepts introduced by his work and which will be implemented in this research, such as his ideas about how debt and reciprocity construct relationships. In the context of this dissertation, Mauss's insights provide a rich theoretical framework for considering the potential of concepts like debt and reciprocity in colonial collecting practices and restitution. More specifically, Mauss introduced the concept of *the spirit of gift* or *hau*. *Hau* in the Trobriand Islands refers to the spirit or essence of the gift, encompassing the social and moral obligations attached to it. According to Mauss, the concept of *hau* emphasizes that when a gift is given, it is imbued with the *hau* of the giver, representing their social status, generosity, and intentions. Similarly, when a gift is received, the recipient incurs a debt of *hau*, creating an obligation to reciprocate in kind. *Hau* is central to understanding the dynamics of gift-exchange in traditional societies as it regulates social interactions. Moreover, the

concept of *hau* highlights the importance of reciprocity and mutual obligation in maintaining social cohesion and harmony. This concept is useful to work on restitution and is so critical in anthropological studies that there is an academic journal named after it called “HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory,” which is published by the Society for Ethnographic Theory.

The reception of Mauss’ *Essay on the Gift* was overwhelmingly positive, and an enormous field of literature grew from Mauss’ ideas to build a corpus of anthropological theory (Liebersohn 2011). Anthropological theories built upon Mauss’ ideas of social materials to posit theories of distributed personhood, the structure of the conjuncture, object biographies, and entanglements. Hodder (2012: 89) has commented on this long lineage. For example, Marilyn Strathern used Mauss’ ideas to build discussions of enchainment and distributed personhood. Specifically, in *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* from 1988, Strathern explores how personhood is understood and constructed within Melanesian societies, emphasizing that individual identity is not solely contained within individuals but is distributed across social relationships, objects, and other entities. Of enchainment specifically, Strathern refers to the same Polynesian and Melanesian cultures to discuss how materials are not a ‘thing-in-itself’ (1988). In *Islands of History* from 1972 Marshall Sahlins also draws on the work of Marcel Mauss to consider how cultures meet in what he calls the structure of the conjuncture, using the death of Cook to make a case for his theory of structural history. *Islands of History* and *Stone Age Economics* by Sahlins contribute to the broader discourse initiated by Mauss by emphasizing the significance of gifts not just as material objects but as symbolic expressions of social ties, obligations, and reciprocity (Sahlins 1972: 186–190).

There were further expansions of Mauss' ideas in Alfred Gell's discussion of distributed personhood in *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (1998). Gell proposed a theory in which art objects mediate social relationships and interactions, sometimes acting as extensions of personhood, introducing concepts such as the "art nexus" and "secondary agency" to explain how artworks facilitate communication and convey messages between artists and viewers. Further, Thomas' 1991 book *Entangled Objects* contains direct acknowledgement of the *Essay on the Gift* and took Mauss' social emphasis even further to suggest that all of the relations between anthropologists and colonized peoples were about establishing reciprocity. Annette Weiner's 1992 work *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* also developed Mauss' ideas on the spirit of the gift to consider "inalienable possessions" or "immoveable goods" within Melanesian societies. Through ethnographic examples primarily drawn from the Trobriand Islands, Weiner examines how inalienable possessions are used in rituals, marriages, and other social contexts to negotiate power dynamics and reinforce social cohesion. Weiner argues that certain objects, termed "inalienable possessions," are imbued with personal and social significance to the extent that they cannot be fully exchanged or given away without undermining social relationships or identity.

These ideas are connected and build on each other and they all function on the idea of materials as mainly relevant to creating and maintaining social relationships. Mauss was the nephew of Émile Durkheim who is often considered the grandfather of sociology and was writing within a context that was extremely cognizant of a social emphasis. Mauss used his uncle's ideas about social relationships and applied them to materials. This breadth of literature that built on gift-exchange theory continued to follow Mauss' stress of material exchange as a social understanding. As such, contemporary anthropological theory places heavy emphasis on what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro calls "the master

concept of anthropology – relation” (de Castro 2014: 170). According to Gell, if “anthropology has a specific subject matter at all, that subject matter is ‘social relationships’” (Gell 1998: 4).

This theoretical focus on considering materials as social through the lens of relationships now dominates museum practice. At the PRM specifically, a 2002–2006 “Relational Museum” project sought to consider the museum’s practice using these theories of relations. Led by Allison Petch and Frances Larson, the project created biographies of field collectors, and graphics to display networks and connections for the various relations at the museum (Larson 2007). The project describes itself as an initiative to “view museums as trans-cultural artifacts composed of relations between the museum and various kinds of communities” (“About the Relational Museum project and the methodology of research” 2013). In this vein, the project positioned the museum within these dominant anthropological ideas of relations, stating that “museums in general represent complex sets of relations between people and things, which are historically dynamic” and held the idea that these “relational models take as a central premise that entities (either people or things) are given shape and value through the relations within which they are enmeshed” (Petch 2004: 129). The project looked at the museum from its founding in 1884 until 1945, an endpoint which was “chosen as a crude beginning point for the eventual post-colonial period” (Petch 2004: 130). As such, these relational theories were only used to consider the active colonial era of the museum, and were not used to consider the current entanglements of the museum. This field of Maussian theory, which dominates the field and informs museum practice, is the unmarked default position in anthropology.

2.3 Anthropology's Pacific Context

For almost a century now, the dominant school of thought in museums of the Global North has followed these anthropological theories of gift-giving. In this sense, this work returns to *The Gift*, as much anthropological literature has historically done. However this is not necessarily global literature but more colonially specific. This field instead comes from these Pacific colonial “encounters” and the location of the Pacific is specific to these ideas. Mauss’ examples of gift-exchange stem from the Pacific, whether southern Pacific in the Trobriand Kula or the north Pacific potlatch of the Haida Gwaii on the western coast of Canada. Strathern focuses almost exclusively on Polynesian and Melanesian Pacific cultures, while Gell’s *Art and Agency* used examples of the Trobriand Islands Kula ring, Māori carvings, Sepik River carvings from Papua New Guinea, and Tapa cloth from Fiji. Thomas’s *Entangled Objects* and Sahlins’ *Islands of History* are also specifically about Pacific colonial encounters, namely Cook’s voyage. Following in a similar vein this work therefore also employs a Pacific focus.

These Pacific locales which served as the foundation for theories on social materials underwent turbulent experiences of colonial violence. The violent dispossession of the Pacific had many extractive players and created a complex history of oppressive governmental control of the island. Even now, the Pacific is still segmented into colonies which still answer to France, the UK and the US such as Tahiti, Fiji, and American Samoa, respectively. In the writings focused on the Kula ring, such as those from Malinowski in 1922, Mauss in 1925, and Gell in 1998, the geographical area in question is the Trobriand Islands which is an archipelago off the coast of Papua New Guinea. Papua New Guinea specifically is the classic archetypal location for ethnographic research, causing one book to note of their approach to ethnographic fieldwork on a

specific street in London that: “This follows from seeing the street as a fieldsite on a par with New Guinea” (Miller 2009: 6).

Prior to European contact, Papua New Guinea was home to diverse Indigenous societies with rich cultural traditions and complex social structures. The first European explorers to arrive in the region were Portuguese and Spanish navigators in the 16th century, followed by Dutch and British traders in the 17th century. However, it was not until the late 19th century that Papua New Guinea came under formal colonial control. The Northern parts of Papua New Guinea suffered under German rule from 1884–1914, while the Southern half was ruled by the British Empire, also from 1884, who gave the land to the Australian government in 1905 as an external territory remaining in Britain's possession. During World War I, Australian forces occupied German New Guinea, leading to the transfer of German territories to Australian administration under a League of Nations mandate. Following World War II, Papua New Guinea became a United Nations Trust Territory under Australian administration. Indigenous resistance to colonial rule, such as the Papuan uprising in 1942 and subsequent movements for independence, contributed to the eventual decolonization of Papua New Guinea. In 1975, Papua New Guinea gained independence from Australia, becoming a sovereign nation with a diverse population of Indigenous peoples speaking hundreds of languages. During the period of British control, materials from Papua New Guinea were collected for English museums. The British Governor of Papua New Guinea took H. Tufnell around Papua New Guinea, where he was able to collect materials that were immediately accessioned into the Pitt Rivers collection in 1899. That same British Governor, William MacGregor, is credited as being connected to almost 880 objects at the Pitt Rivers Museum, many of which were accessioned in 1899, just two years after his post ended.

Even when Papua New Guinea was not fully under British rule in the 1930s, anthropologists from the Pitt Rivers Museum like Beatrice Blackwood were able to travel there for the purpose of study. Blackwood collected thousands of objects during her lifetime and brought them to the Pitt Rivers Museum. Blackwood was especially interested in the race sciences early in her career, specifically with physical measurements and mental testing. According to Larson's overview of Blackwood's work, Blackwood was interested in mental testing but "preferred to concentrate on taking physical measurements because she knew that the mental tests were constantly being reviewed and changed and she was unsure how useful they would be" (Larson 2006: 2). Blackwood would travel and take measurements of skulls, such as when she visited Nashville in April of 1925 and took measurements of students at two Black colleges. In 1930 in New Guinea, she took measurements of local people in Tabut, Kurtachi, and Ruri. She described the experience in her diaries as "the filthiest and most disgustingly repulsive job" that she had ever done (Blackwood 1930: 1). She wrote that these physical measurements were not providing any information but that she felt compelled to do it, saying: "the numbers are too few to be any good. I can't help it – I just can't chase around to any more villages in search of victims...It was only the feeling that I couldn't face you without having done any measuring, that forced me to go through with it." (Blackwood, 1930: 1). Blackwood refers to the people she is measuring as victims and is clear about her distaste for such projects, but felt forced into it. This is the type of fieldwork that Blackwood and other anthropologists undertook in Papua New Guinea.

Taking these physical measurements during fieldwork was a critical aspect of physical anthropology. Larson notes that in Blackwood's Oxford lecture titled "What is Anthropology" Blackwood defined ethnology as: "the application of any or all of the methods of Anthropology to the comparative study of races or peoples" after Penniman

in *One Hundred Years of Anthropology* (Larson 2006). On her travels to Papua New Guinea, Blackwood collected specimens at the specific request of the museum curators in Oxford, even begrudgingly cutting her fieldwork short in order to prioritize securing materials for the Pitt Rivers Museum collections (Larson 2006). She also traveled a second time to Melanesia in 1936 under the specific direction to collect materials requested by Balfour for the museum. However, she also notes in her fieldwork diaries that she is aware of her work's proximity to the functions of empire, and laments that she cannot carry out fieldwork in "uncontrolled" areas:

The trouble in this country from my point of view is that any village in which it is possible to live has had contact with whites and some of its life has been altered, while the untouched natives are interesting but one cannot work with them as it is impossible to get Government permission to enter the "uncontrolled area."
(Blackwood papers box 19, letter to Mallard, 10 October 1936)

Ultimately, places in the Pacific like Papua New Guinea grappled for many years with the tumultuous effects of colonial domination. During this time, anthropologists conducted studies in the Pacific region, seeking to understand and document Indigenous cultures, languages, and customs while collecting anthropological materials for museums. Next, I consider how Mauss specifically engaged with colonialism in the Pacific as he developed his theories on the gift, contextualizing the development of Mauss' ideas within the French colonial environment in which Mauss wrote the essay and researched materials from the Pacific.

2.4 Mauss' Materials

Despite this history of violence in the Pacific during this time of material collecting for museums, Pacific anthropological literature continued to focus on the idea of the gift. To understand this, I look now to Mauss' research process more specifically. Mauss wrote in the 1920s in a very specific inter-war context and it is also important to consider the

ways in which Mauss undertook his scholarly research. As this section explains, in Mauss' case, he was able to write about cultural materials because he was directly involved in the extractive process of harvesting these materials from the Pacific through his involvement with the French Institute of Ethnology.

Some anthropologists, like Beatrice Blackwood, were obsessed with the idea of Malinowskian-style fieldwork. Blackwood specifically was fascinated with the idea of living on one fieldwork site for a long period of time and even wrote about how she wished she had brought a copy of Malinowski's *Argonauts* with her on her fieldwork trip to Papua New Guinea (Larson 2006). On the other hand, in contrast to Blackwood or Malinowski's fieldwork, Mauss wrote from Paris and drew from the accounts of other anthropologists for evidence. One study of Marcel Mauss' personal library regarded him as an "armchair anthropologist" (Bert 2017: 21). This "armchair anthropology" is apparent in the evidence used to form the ideas of *The Gift*. Mauss specifically pays great attention to material exchange but does not reference specific objects to build his arguments. His evidence is based on ethnographic fieldwork records, for example referencing Alfred Radcliffe-Brown's notes from his 1906 expedition for the University of Cambridge, Charles Seligman's travel notes from the Alfred Cort Haddon 1898 expedition to the Torres Strait Islands, and even Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). This was part of a larger context in which scholars turned to the library. In a sense, my research also parallels this as due to COVID-19 lockdowns during the first years of my doctorate, I also could not rely on fieldwork for this dissertation. Further, this is also a critical reflection of how Western scholarship uses museological collections and archives to create ideas about other cultures. Mauss' work is critical to consider human remains within anthropological literature and theory because of his connections to how museums and archives function for scholarship.

However, *The Gift* was published in 1925, which was around the same time that Mauss was founding the Institute of Ethnology in Paris. The institute was intended to “serve as a bridge between the aging generation of colonial administrators and reformers to the newcomers in the field of colonial administration” (Mallard 2019: 23). Gregoire Mallard wrote *Gift Exchange: The Transnational History of a Political Idea* in 2019 and explored Mauss’ work and the intricate connections between gift-exchange practices and political structures on a global scale, where he describes Mauss’ pedagogical techniques, saying:

Mauss’s students learned how to collect, identify, date, classify, and display the artefacts and fetishes they brought back from their ethnological missions, and they mingled with the art collectors of the worlds of high finance, like the Rothschilds and Lazards, who funded their missions abroad. (Mallard 2019: 23)

This connection to the colonies was in fact a base principle of this field, as at the 1926 founding of the Institute of Ethnology, article two stated that their purpose is to “send missions to the colonies and exceptionally elsewhere” (Conklin 2013: 87). In fact, a great strength of Mauss’ school of French ethnography was this connection to fieldwork in the colonies, which has been recently described as such:

Mauss’s doctoral students became ethnology’s pioneering foot soldiers, testing empirically in the field certain anthropological constants that Mauss had formulated for understanding the different lifeways of “primitive peoples.” (Conklin 2013: 3)

This connection to French colonialism was explicit. From Mallard’s descriptions of the institute, we can start to guess at how Mauss was able to view and think about materials from the Pacific. Despite his lack of fieldwork, materials were brought to him through this system of violent extraction. In *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections: The Crisis of Cultural Authority* from 2011, Tiffany Jenkins examines how museums have historically acquired human remains through colonialism, excavation, and donation, often

without consent or consideration for the cultural significance of these remains. In sum, she argues that museological collecting was historically an extractive practice. In a similar way, at the Institute of Ethnology, students were sent on missions to collect materials for study as a part of their ethnographic mission. Mallard discusses Mauss' campaign to create this new French science of *ethnology*, offering a quote from Mauss on his definition of ethnography, which Mauss defined as:

...the science which describes and classifies races, peoples, civilizations, or rather, that part of the science which focuses on the races, peoples and civilizations of an inferior rank, which differs from that other part called 'history' or 'folklore,' which describes the peoples of the East and of ancient Europe. (Mauss quoted in Mallard 2019: 30)

Mauss' definition of ethnology is clear about its relationship to the governance of the colonies, indicating that Mauss was extremely cognizant of the direct links of his work with maintaining colonial power. In fact, Gregoire Mallard's 2019 research into the Fonds Marcel Mauss shows that Mauss wrote to the Ministry of the Colonies in favor of strengthening this connection. He notes that "Mauss took considerable pains to convince the Ministry of the Colonies of the practical benefits that could derive from the development of ethnology in France" (Mallard 2019: 31). In an eleven page unpublished manuscript from 1902, Mauss wrote "nowhere is it truer that in colonial policy that 'knowledge is power'" (Mauss 1902: 1). As Mallard puts it, Mauss believed that:

Ethnology had practical implications for the art of colonial government that anthropology lacked: the measurement of crania may be of interest to racist criminologists interested in the science of eugenics but it does not tell you how to extract taxes from local populations without breaking implicit or secret sacred obligations for which tax collectors can be sanctioned by death. (Mallard 2019: 31)

Mauss saw anthropology as less pressing, as the discipline could continue to use as evidence "racial traits that can endure a long time after a civilization has lost its mental, social and national singularity" (Mauss quoted in Mallard 2019: 30). In contrast, he felt

that “cultural ethnography and museographic sciences were eminently pressing tasks for Mauss, as cultural practices and artefacts could disappear in one generation after the French occupation of new territories” (Mauss quoted in Mallard 2019: 30). Mallard’s book *Gift Exchange: The Transnational History of a Political Idea* has already illustrated how Mauss’ *Essay on the Gift* was written in the context of preoccupations with ideas about “the politics of European powers inside and outside Europe” (Mallard 2019: 6). Clearly, Mauss was very aware of the extremely violent and temporal functions of French colonial practices, as Mauss’ concerns stemmed from his understanding that French occupation was violent and threatened the extant cultures.

Despite the violent colonial occupation of Papua New Guinea and Mauss’ awareness of the violence of colonial occupation, Mauss’ writing stops considering material exchanges once the material is collected. The social implications for materials were not considered by Mauss’ work once they were collected abroad. Most of anthropology has since followed suit. The paradoxical emphasis within anthropology on gifts, juxtaposed with its historical backdrop of thefts, is undoubtedly linked. This avoidance is not new, but can be traced directly back to Mauss; there is a specific endnote in *The Gift* in which Mauss references a thief, but applies his theory of the spirit of the gift to those stolen materials. This note is a direct example of the wider anthropological problem of ignoring extractive dispossession by framing theft under a language of gifts.

More generally, more recent anthropological theories which built on *The Gift* can be used to frame extractive anthropology within a framework of gift-giving. For example, Thomas’ *Entangled Objects* was intended to critique an oversimplified difference between gift economies and commodity economies and further build on Mauss’ ideas of materials as important because of their social value, but ultimately argued that economic

anthropology has been structured by a pervasive overvaluation of the impact of colonialism and diminished the widespread extractivism that defined these Pacific colonial encounters under the guise of making space to acknowledge agency of the colonized Indigenous groups (Thomas 1991; Alexander 1994).

This phenomenon wherein the focus on gift-exchange obscures extractive violence was both a historic tool of colonialism in the Pacific as well as a current issue in anthropology. Historically, a tool of colonialism was to rely on the pretense of gifts and exchange in order to extract materials from their colonial subjects. For example, Karen Sykes has explored how historic “misunderstandings about gift exchange become a fulcrum from which to lever out wealth from Pacific Island societies” (2005: 98). In *Arguing with Anthropology*, Sykes demonstrates how European focus on gift-exchange was used as a tool of colonial domination and resource extraction, creating conditions of violence and debt. Sykes argues that many anthropologists have uncritically accepted Mauss's ideas without sufficiently considering their limitations or the broader socio-political contexts in which gift-giving occurs. Sykes illustrates how gift-giving can involve unequal power dynamics, where one party exploits the generosity of another for economic gain. For example, colonial powers may offer seemingly generous gifts to Indigenous peoples while simultaneously exploiting their labor and resources for profit. Again, even Sykes' discussion of how some societies become indebted to colonial powers draws on Pacific examples for two of her three main arguments (Sykes 2005: 111). However, this occurred in many colonial settings. Sean Willcock writes in *Composing the Spectacle: Colonial Portraiture and the Coronation Durbars of British India, 1877–1911* about how in India the British solicited portraits from the royal families. He notes that the Indian people who sat for these portraits were misled under the impression that they would receive the finished painting. However, the British were actually commissioning these portraits in

order to send them back to England. Willcock also reveals how once the people sitting for these paintings realized that they would not be party to a fair exchange, they stopped being cooperative and deliberately attempted to sabotage the painting (2016). In this sense, the shroud of exchange was historically leveraged to extract materials.

It is in this context that Maussian anthropologists developed a discourse of gift-exchange. Maussian anthropologists operated in an environment marked by colonial violence and their anthropological work contributed to colonial domination. However, this was not solely confined to the Pacific region or to French colonial exploits, because these imperial connections were a prevalent feature of anthropology more generally.

2.5 Anthropology's History of Extraction

Mauss' anthropology had specific connections to French colonialism. But more broadly, the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology have been historically complicit in the generation of racism, alterity, and empire through dehumanization. Anthropology has always been actively aware of its collusion with imperialism as this relationship was historically exploited in support of empire. I am writing from the University of Oxford, where this relationship is directly evident: Sir Reginald Wingate, who was the Governor-General of the Sudan¹ from 1899–1916 once asked Oxford and Cambridge to “provide instruction in anthropology to probationers for the Sudan Service” (Anthropology and Empire 1921). He also sent anthropologists to Sudan specifically to collect information on local customs in order to rule more effectively. It was at Wingate's special request that Charles Seligman traveled to Sudan (Anthropology and Empire 1921)

¹ Under British-Egyptian rule in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the territory we now know as Sudan was formally referred to as "The Sudan", following the British tendency to use "the" before territorial names, as seen in The Congo or The Gambia. After Sudan gained independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956, the country gradually moved away from the colonial nomenclature. The official name became simply "Sudan", reflecting its emergence as a sovereign nation with its own distinct identity.

where he conducted research that provided colonial administrators with detailed knowledge of the social structures and cultural practices of Sudanese communities, which was often used to shape and justify policies of indirect rule.

A 1921 article in *Nature* explicitly details how anthropologists are needed to sustain British rule. The article, titled “Anthropology and Empire,” from February 3, 1921, discusses the development and significance of anthropology, particularly its practical applications in legislation and administration related to native peoples in British colonies and dependencies. It highlights the Royal Anthropological Institute’s efforts to promote the study of anthropology and its importance in colonial governance, and says that “the government of our subject races is beset with difficulties” and outlines the ways in which anthropologists can be made complicit in creating colonized people (Anthropology and Empire 1921).

It was not until the 1970s that these same functions of anthropology were widely criticized instead of encouraged and a wave of scholarship attempted to understand how archaeology and anthropology specifically created and sustained the racist ideologies of the empire. In 1968, Kathleen Gough argued in “Anthropology: A Child of Imperialism” that anthropologists had colluded in imperialism. A decade later, in 1978, Edward Said made a firm connection in *Orientalism* between Western scholarship and oppressive systems of power which generate alterity. His work provided an example of how academic studies represented colonized cultures (the “orient” specifically) as a homogeneous, exoticized, and inferior Other, demonstrating how these representations served to justify colonial domination and reinforce Western superiority. Later, in *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, Talal Asad (1973) explained how Anthropology worked to serve the interests of colonial powers in understanding and

controlling colonized peoples, and stated that “the process of European global power has been central to the anthropological task of recording and analyzing the ways of life of subject populations, even when a serious consideration of that power was theoretically excluded” (Asad 1973: 315).

Anthropology historically worked within this “imperialist framework” with fieldwork carried out in colonized areas and on colonized people (Gough 1968: 13). This imperial connection wherein anthropology is positioned as an intermediary became more widely accepted after Kathleen Gough wrote “Anthropology: Child of Imperialism” in 1968, when she wrote that anthropologists were seen as “white liberals between the conquerors and the colonised” (Gough 1968: 17). This attitude is clear from the way that anthropologists discuss their work, with one 1910 *Nature* article noting of an area of Papua New Guinea that “it is important that it should be investigated before the natives are further modified by contact with the white man” (A Finnish Ethnological Expedition to British Papua 1910: 442). This quote illustrates how anthropologists separated themselves from colonial actors. In this unique positioning for anthropologists, the idea of the anthropological informant was critical (Trembley 1957). In anthropology, an informant refers to an individual who provides information to a researcher about a particular culture, society, or phenomenon under study. Informants play a crucial role in ethnographic research, which relies heavily on firsthand observations and interactions within the community being studied. Anthropological informants might share personal experiences, offer explanations, clarify cultural concepts, or provide interpretations of social dynamics. Building rapport and establishing trust with informants is essential for the success of ethnographic research, as it fosters open communication and enables researchers to gain access to valuable insights and information. However, according to Gough, anthropologists believed they were “of higher social status than their informants; they

were usually of the dominant race, and they were protected by imperial law; yet, living closely with native peoples, they tended to take their part and to try to protect them against the worst forms of imperialist exploitation” (1968:13). In this sense, anthropologists were positioned as middlemen between colonial actors and the colonized, rather than a direct actor.

Since Gough wrote in 1968 it has been more frequently recognized that anthropology was applied to create racist narratives of empire everywhere that the empire spread. Patrick Wolfe (2016) has described how different types of settler colonialism and extractive colonialism create their own unique racial ideologies of otherness. In many different geographic contexts, the collusion of anthropology in the creation of alterity has been explored. For example, Andrew Apter (1999) in “Africa, Empire, and Anthropology: A Philological Exploration of Anthropology’s Heart of Darkness” has documented the ways in which African anthropology and ethnography contributes to racism. Apter argues that anthropology’s portrayal of Africa has often been shaped by Eurocentric biases, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing colonial power dynamics. Through a philological analysis of key texts and narratives, Apter illustrates the linguistic and ideological mechanisms through which these representations were constructed. Similarly for the British Indian context, in “From Texts to Bodies: Brian Houghton Hodgson and the Emergence of Ethnology in India,” Peter Pels documented the life and work of Brian Houghton Hodgson, a British colonial administrator and scholar who made significant contributions to the development of ethnology in India during the 19th century. In this work Pels detailed how “in the early 19th-century administration of British India, orientalism was ... superseded by ethnology” (1999: 66). Alice Conklin (2013) and Lygia Sigaud (2002) have similarly both explored the history of French anthropology’s use of the relationship between anthropological museums and colonial administration.

American anthropology has also contributed to the maintenance of its own power structures (Stocking 1987; Fabian 2010; Teslow 2014), and similarly in Sweden and Belgium.

However, as the writing is focused on the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, England, it is important to expand on the fact that the specific context of this historical racism in Britain traces back to Victorian race sciences. British Victorian anthropology was heavily focused on ideas of evolutionism and racial difference (Stocking 1987). Not only was anthropology an academic pursuit, but also an *applied* political and moral mandate of the empire, in line with Mauss' constructions of the duties of ethnology and anthropology. This is described by Apter (1999) in his overview of how African anthropology was applied, who stated that:

“[Anthropology] also provided the working guidelines for colonial officers and government anthropologists following Lugard's (1965) 'dual mandate' in Africa – the uplifting of native peoples according to their natural (i.e. racial) capabilities while benefiting commerce and industry at home.” (Apter 1999: 581)

At the Pitt Rivers Museum specifically, Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers, the founding collector of the museum based his museological collections off these anthropological race sciences and organized materials by group to show the progression of civilization. In a paper from 1875 by Augustus Henry Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers called "On the Principles of Classification adopted in the Arrangement of his Anthropological Collection, now exhibited in the Bethnal Green Museum," he explains that one part of his collection is related to physical anthropology and is comprised of skulls and hair from different races (Fox 1875: 293). This primary category of his collections is about biological race sciences, while the remainder of the collections of cultural materials “have been selected and arranged in sequence, so as to trace, as far as practicable, the

succession of ideas by which the minds of men in a primitive condition of culture have progressed from the simple to the complex” (Fox 1875: 294). In this sense, we see tangible dispossession in the form of material extraction wherein cultural materials are taken into the museum, as well as intangible dispossession in the ways that entire cultures are positioned as primitive and uncivilized. His method of display fits with the dominant anthropological ideas which sought to categorize people and cultures. The materials in the museum supported and maintained the anthropological thinking which was used to create racism; these race sciences were then specifically used to support the British Empire. For example, in “Art and/or Ethnographica? The Reception of Benin Works from 1897–1935,” Kathryn Wysocki Gunsch illustrated how the Benin Bronzes were used in England to ensure support for the empire, noting that “racism was a politically expedient method of cajoling British popular support for colonialism and military action in Africa” (Gunsch 2013: 23).

The materials housed within the museum supported the anthropological theories that underpinned the construction of racism. In the museum, the display of human remains can contribute to what some scholars call “carceral aesthetics.” In Simone Browne’s book *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015), Browne referred to the ways in which the design, architecture, and visual representations of spaces and objects are influenced by and reproduce systems of surveillance and control, particularly those aimed at subjugating Black bodies. In the context of art and cultural studies, Nicole R. Fleetwood has expanded upon this concept in *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (2020). Fleetwood uses “carceral aesthetics” to describe the ways in which visual culture, including art, photography, and film, depict and reinforce the structures and effects of mass incarceration in the United States. Carceral aesthetics encompass both the literal representations of prisons, policing, and surveillance in visual art, as well

as the broader cultural imaginaries and ideologies that normalize and justify punitive practices. In essence, Fleetwood's notion of carceral aesthetics examines how visual culture shapes and reflects societal perceptions of punishment, confinement, and control, and how it contributes to the reproduction of carceral logics and systems. This idea can be readily mapped onto how human remains can be used in museums to enforce carceral systems.

The outcome of the racist narratives which were historically generated in collusion with anthropology ultimately functioned to allow for the commodification of human beings. In "South remembers: Those Who Are Dead Are Not Ever Gone" by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, he writes on the maintenance of supremacy and the ethnological museum and reminds us of symmetry between how anthropological museums objectify humans and how the empire objectifies humans, saying that that the objectification of the cultural materials of Indigenous people in the anthropological museums of the Global North is in line with the dehumanization and objectification of humans from the non-West (Ndikung 2019: 6). Basically, anthropology was necessary for empire, as the systematic looting of colonized cultures was not an unfortunate byproduct of imperialism, but an active way in which the empire created the racism necessary to support itself. The 1921 article called "Anthropology and Empire" (but not as an indictment) details the "inevitable" need for human labor in order to exploit the tropics. Next, it notes that as "white labour will not be available," "primitive peoples" will have to be used for this labor, not through "compulsory or indentured labour," but through coercion through knowledge of anthropology. The article also notes that:

The Royal Anthropological Institute, which has just completed the fiftieth year of its existence, while steadily pursuing its main object of promoting the study of man, has constantly insisted upon the importance of this science as a fundamental element in certain departments of legislation and administration,

particularly in relation to the native peoples of our Colonies and Dependencies.
(*Anthropology and Empire* 1921: 717)

In this sense, humans were reduced to objects and commodified by the British Empire in a manner only possible through the deployment of anthropology. A crucial part of this dehumanization involved material culture. Anthropology used ethnographic materials to dehumanize cultures which the British Empire wished to colonize. A critical part of this dehumanization through oppression and colonization (Fanon 1961, Freire 1968) centers on the notion of permanence: in the museum, time is weaponized, and chronopolitics is used to create alterity, racism, and empire. In this form of “chronopolitics,” time is used to generate alterity. Anthropology, archaeology, and the museum function to freeze an entire society in time, while also reducing them to living relics of the past (Fabian 1983). Anthropology contributes to these politics of empire, by asserting the permanence of the museum, and the impermanence of the colonized. In this case, the false assertion is that objects can experience permanence in the English museum, but not in the Global South. The idea of museum collections as “a permanent repository” (Weil 1997a: 3) prevents returns and contributes to how materials held in the museums of the Global North play an important role in supporting how certain cultures are presented as relics.

A well-documented example of this type of weaponization of time by museological materials is the ways in which the Benin Bronzes function to create anti-Black racism which supported the colonial exploitation and eventual destruction of the Kingdom of Benin, now present-day Nigeria. Early narratives constructed around Benin art consistently produce racism through the manipulation and control of time. Coombes’ 1994 survey of the English reception of Benin Bronzes notes that every author who discussed the Benin Bronzes in the decade following the British Punitive Expedition “referred to their shock at the quality of Benin workmanship and their surprise at finding

such pieces in Africa” (1994: 61). This argument persists today in many forms, with a recent example of this seen when the art critic Grayson Perry questioned whether “Australian Aboriginal painting should be classified – or exhibited – as ‘contemporary art’” (Totaro 2015). The idea that there is no African history, or that there’s no art in Africa, is an idea in part created by the material holdings of African art in England. Of course, the British Empire and the museum obliterated African right to history, and stole all the historical art from Africa. In the specific case of this research, the museological ownership of Kula objects similarly asserts the impermanence of the Pacific gift-exchange system and the permanence of the English museum. Despite Malinowski’s assertion that the saying in Papua New Guinea is “once in the Kula, always in the Kula,” the stability and permanence of the Kula is denied by the museological stoppage once materials are collected. Anthropology, archaeology, and the museum function to freeze an entire society in time, while also reducing them to living relics of the past (Fabian 1983). In this weaponization of time, colonized people are dehumanized and the museum has been a key part of how empire achieves this.

Related to this is the idea of “Necropolitics,” a concept introduced by Cameroonian philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe in 2019. In this work, Mbembe examines the ways in which modern forms of power operate through the control and regulation of death. Mbembe argues that in contemporary societies, particularly those affected by colonialism, imperialism, and neoliberalism, certain populations are subjected to conditions of “social death” and are treated as disposable or expendable. This includes not only physical violence and killings but also the systemic deprivation of resources, opportunities, and rights. Necropolitics in this sense refers to the exercise of power through the administration of death, where sovereignty is exercised not just over the living but also over the dead and dying. Using Mbembe’s ideas, we can see here that

the dispossession anthropology supports is systemic. It involves more than money and physical things, but includes a dispossession from a lived reality. For example, in this type of systemic dispossession, Africa is “not left as non-capitalist, but is performed as ‘pre-capitalist’” (Hicks 2020: 22). The key role of anthropology in this dispossession is the taking of a right to a lived present and contributing to cultural extraction.

2.6 Accumulation by Dispossession

In sum, the historical practices of anthropology have operated within frameworks characterized by extractivism. This attention to power and extraction is not new and is evident as early as 1913 when Rosa Luxemburg tried to account for imperialism in the Marxist tradition and noted that the extractive economy relies on exploiting the colonized economies (1913). More recently, the concept of cultural extraction has been discussed by scholars such as Arjun Appadurai, who wrote of cultural extraction in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. This 1986 edited book discusses how commodities are imbued with cultural meanings and how they circulate within global networks of exchange, often resulting in the extraction of cultural value from marginalized communities. The essays in the book examine how commodities acquire value and the impact of global trade networks on local economies and cultures, highlighting the power dynamics involved in the production and consumption of commodities, as well as the role of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism in shaping the global economy.

Additionally, writers like bell hooks have also examined cultural extraction within the context of colonialism, globalization, and cultural imperialism. In her book *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992), hooks discusses how dominant cultures appropriate and exploit elements of marginalized cultures for their own benefit, thereby perpetuating

systems of oppression. hooks argues that cultural extraction occurs when white-dominated industries appropriate and commodify aspects of Black culture, such as music, fashion, language, and art, without proper recognition or respect for their origins. This process of extraction often results in the commodification of Blackness for profit, while reinforcing stereotypes and limiting the agency of Black individuals. In sum, hooks and Appadurai note that cultural extraction must be considered with attention to power dynamics.

With this in mind, I return to *The Gift* and to Mauss' ideas of debt and reciprocity with attention to power and extraction suggested by Appadurai and hooks. I intend to extend these conceptualizations of systematic dispossession of the Global South to include material culture. To understand this, this research can borrow from David Harvey, who has already described "accumulation by dispossession" (2004). In *The New Imperialism* (2003), Harvey explores how capitalism evolves and expands through various mechanisms of dispossession. Harvey contends that traditional Marxist theories, which primarily focused on exploitation within the production process, are insufficient to capture the dynamics of modern capitalism and introduces the idea that capitalism now relies significantly on accumulation by dispossession, where capital accumulates through various means of dispossessing individuals and communities. This includes processes such as privatization, financialization, ongoing primitive accumulation, spatial fixes, and the use of state power and violence to facilitate dispossession. By applying these ideas to anthropological material culture, I hope to bridge these anthropological theories with literature which exposes the workings of imperialist extraction.

This type of cultural extraction in anthropology was widespread during the era of British colonial rule but is also evident in the historic collections of natural sciences and natural

history. For botanical, geological, zoological, and scientific collections of non-European origin, natural specimens are appraised as extractable resources. As noted by Carolyn Hamilton and Pippa Skotnes in *Uncertain Curature: In and Out Of The Archive*, natural history specimens are resources to be exploited rather than archival repositories (2014). This extractive approach to collections underscores the importance of the connection between economics and anthropology. For example, Malinowski, Mauss, and much of the literature which followed this tradition tended to impose Western economic theory on ethnology. The “norm of reciprocity,” which traces back to Adam Smith and the rise of “economics,” “the market,” and capitalism, is ever present in many of these conceptualizations of exchange. The idea of *presentations* and *contre-presentations* is parochial and linear, operating on the principles of eventual balancing out. But what about when there is no balance? In *Stone Age Economics*, Sahlins argues that reciprocity ranges in form, from generalized, overbalanced, to an all-taking negative reciprocity. He writes that the differences between the forms expresses and constitutes social distance (Sahlins 1972: 191). A connection can be made here between Sahlins’ all-taking negative reciprocity and Sykes’ illustration of how “misunderstandings” of the gift in early colonial encounters caused certain societies to become indebted to colonial powers (Sykes 2005: 111).

Therefore there is a link here that can be drawn between the financial debt and impoverishment of the Global South and the cultural dispossession of the Global South. David Graeber has already illustrated the financial dispossession of the Global South in *Debt: The First 5000 Years*. Graeber’s *Debt* is an investigation into both anthropology and economics, but his work on debt can provide a framework with which to consider material exchange. This 2011 book is a comprehensive exploration of the history, anthropology, and sociology of debt and money wherein Graeber challenges

conventional economic theories by arguing that debt and credit systems have played a fundamental role in human societies long before the emergence of money. He examines various historical and cultural examples, ranging from ancient Mesopotamia to contemporary economies, to illustrate how debt relationships have shaped social structures, power dynamics, and even moral codes. Like Mauss, Graeber argues that debt is not simply an economic relationship but is deeply intertwined with social and political factors. Graeber discredits the notion that debt is a purely individual obligation, suggesting that debt relations are often asymmetrical and can be used to exert power and control over others.

One of Graeber's key points is that exchange implies a potential for formal equality and reciprocity (2011: 109). On the other hand, exchanges in relations of explicit hierarchy operate on precedent, which is very much the opposite principle (2011: 110). Specifically, Graeber illustrates how these arrangements turn a logic of hierarchy into a logic of identity, caste, or race. As Graeber notes, "no one expects the patron to provide so much help that it threatens to undermine the underlying inequality" (2011: 115). Graeber illustrates how these systems of hierarchical and unequal giving create a lesser type of people, and ultimately, racism. This is achieved through many ways. For the extractive colonialism in Africa, violence enables humans to become objects of exchange, manifest in the transatlantic slave trade (Graeber 2011: 208).

Though Graeber is discussing this specific context of the transatlantic slave trade, I am extending this to consider colonialism more widely, as a similar phenomenon occurs in the method by which the British Empire oppressed the colonies. For example, in Papua New Guinea this was achieved through settler colonialism and plantations. The premise is that the colonized owes the colonizer. This phenomenon occurs as such: one is

indebted, but unable to ever fully pay the debt. However, one is still constantly paying. It is these flows of endless tributes which mark the system of dispossession. In the modern day, this takes the form of an unpayable loan, forever accumulating so much interest that the originally loaned amount has already been paid many times over. Maybe this attention to extraction can help understand how Beatrice Blackwood came to harvest 2000 objects from people in Papua New Guinea in fewer than 18 months. Graeber's ideas can also help understand not just the systemic dispossession, but also the museological debt now owed to the Global South. He notes, "one could judge how egalitarian society really was by exactly this: whether those ostensibly in positions of authority are merely conduits for redistribution, or able to use their positions to accumulate riches" (Graeber 2011: 113). Our new anthropological theory can borrow from this. The question, reframed, is as such: do museums use our positions to redistribute or do we continue to function in an extractive, exploitative and generative framework?

2.7 Restitution to Counter Extractivism

One response to this historic accumulation by dispossession is Onyekachi Wambu's "10 Rs," which is a framework that outlines key principles for effective and respectful engagement with communities, particularly in the context of international development and humanitarian work (Wambu 2020: 4). Onyekachi Wambu's "10 Rs" is a framework he developed for understanding the complexities and nuances of reparative justice work, and outlines ten key principles or considerations that should inform discussions and actions in this field. Wambu suggests the following initiatives to combat this extractivism: "recognition of the crimes; remembrance of the victims; restoration of dignity; restitution of artefacts and human remains; reparations and compensation; reconnections with the severed African world; reconciliation between the continent and diaspora; return as

achieved by groups like Rastas; reimagining the future; reconstruction of African societies” (Wambu 2020: 4). Wambu’s framework emphasizes the need for reconnection, reconciliation, and reimagining of futures, recognizing the interconnectedness of communities and the importance of fostering mutual understanding and solidarity in the pursuit of social justice. Most critically, within Wambu’s framework, reparations, restitution, and returns are critical tools for social justice. The inclusion of restitution of artifacts and human remains, reparations, and returns in this framework highlights the significance of tangible actions in rectifying historical injustices.

According to Wambu, restitution can attempt to counter this historic extractive accumulation by dispossession. In this sense, restitution is about social justice. In recent years, academia has increasingly embraced and engaged in discussions surrounding the construction of restitution as a critical tool in reparative justice efforts. For example, in *Ten Principles for an Anti-Racist, Anti-Orientalist, Activist Approach to Collections* by Masum Momaya, Momaya agrees with Wambu and argues that an activist view of collections considers restitution as a critical part of any collections policy (2017). Similarly, in “Decolonizing Museums, Memorials, and Monuments” from 2021, Amy Lonetree addresses the importance of returning museum objects as part of the broader decolonization process, emphasizing that returning museum objects is not merely about repatriation of artifacts. She argues that returns are also about recognizing and respecting Indigenous sovereignty, cultural autonomy, and self-determination, and that by returning these objects, museums can acknowledge the agency and rights of Indigenous peoples over their cultural heritage. Lonetree suggests that returning museum objects can serve as a form of reparative justice.

These conceptualizations of returns are supported by the histories of restitution, which demonstrate that this process is about social justice rather than anything else. For example, the term “deaccession” has been likened to cultural restitution, as they sometimes invoke similar museological processes; however, a brief examination of the histories of deaccession illuminates how deaccession is primarily about selling, while histories of cultural restitution are specifically about social justice. It could plausibly be conceived that deaccessioning is simply the process through which items leave a collection and that restitution is simply a type of deaccessioning which involves a return to a claimant. However, the histories of these terms are vastly different. While deaccessioning and restitution are often conflated, the act of deaccessioning is more closely related to histories of collections which are deaccessioned specifically with the intent to sell.

One of the first documented uses of the term “deaccession” in public newsprint was in 1972 by arts critic John Canaday (Canaday 1972, Shubinski 2007, Fincham 2011). His critique lies in his description of the sale of Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) collections as having been “de-accessioned (the polite term for ‘sold’)” (Canaday 1972: 21). The vast majority of these first uses of the term “deaccession” in print media in the 1970s exclusively referred to the selling of items of a museum collection (Canaday 1972, Mellow 1972, Hillier 1974). Though this term does not appear in newspapers frequently before the 1970s, the museological practice which the term of “deaccession” refers to did occur frequently, as even in its first public use, Canaday says of deaccessioning, that “the rule is, keep it quiet” (Canaday 1972). Martin Gammon’s study of notable deaccessions spans from 1622 until 2018, and none of the deaccessions listed in his study are restitutions (2018). Further, there are many reasons for deaccessioning, but the primary ones outlined by Chen’s legal overview of deaccession mainly describe

deaccession either for sale or due to loss of value to the collections (2009). If deaccession is not connected to the sale or profit, then it is often a discussion of deaccessioning materials which are no longer of value. Because of this, there can be somewhat negative connotations connected to deaccessioning. Even from the earliest public use of the term “deaccessioning,” the process was being criticized. I draw attention to the differences between these processes as it would be remiss to conflate these discourses with those surrounding restitution; though an object may be deaccessioned from collections during restitution processes, the museological histories differ.

It would therefore be inaccurate to use “restitution” and “deaccessioning” interchangeably. Restitution involves return to a source community or claimant (often an original owner or rightful heir). As there are such a variety of subtly different names and terms for the process of returns and I would like to distinguish between some of these ideas, I would like to distinguish between the variety of terminology used to describe processes of returns. The most commonly recognized words for returns are repatriation and restitution. Terms such as reparations or deaccessioning are also often employed. Other suggestions which have been proposed include “cultural recovery” and “rematriation,” which is intended to specifically refer to the return of Indigenous seeds in Canada. These varying labels are sometimes used interchangeably; however, these are all discrete and separate processes which should not be conflated. There are convincing arguments that none of these terms are adequate and that the term “returns” is most accurate; nevertheless, the particular histories of these terms are useful to understanding returns. While deaccession is intimately linked with deaccession with intent to sell, the histories of restitution are more closely linked with social justice.

In contrast to deaccessioning and being re-purchased privately or disposed of, the process of returns frequently involves specifically requested materials being accessioned into another collection and experiencing continued use. The further specific history of restitution as social justice is evident in the difference between how these “types” of returns are treated. The difference between these histories is evident in even the earliest discussions of returns: the 1904 “Ethics of Loot” article in *The Washington Post*, which is cryptically attributed to “an ex-attache,” responds to public discussion of issues surrounding returns in 1904. It begins with a discussion of the potential return of a cope to Ascoli Piceno Cathedral in Italy, before considering potential returns from the Louvre and the Parthenon Marbles from the British Museum to Greece. It finally concludes with the position that “since Waterloo, looting in wars between civilized nations has been virtually abandoned. It is, however, still tolerated in conflicts with barbarous or semi-barbarous foes” (*The Washington Post* 1904: E5). Basically, material culture should not be stolen from civilized nations as looting is only acceptable for “barbarous foes”. As such, these returns are distinctly about social justice because of the ways in which the cultural materials in British museums historically functioned to support racism.

However, the histories of these processes suffer from a sort of denial of the longstanding nature of these histories. In Gammon’s 2018 examination of the histories of deaccession, *Deaccessioning and Its Discontents*, he explains what he calls “deaccession denial.” He outlines a type of forgetting which surrounds these long histories of deaccession, noting that “one consequence of this neglect is the frequent false premise that deaccession is somehow a novel or recent aberration from proper museum practice” (Gammon 2018: xiv). I would extend this idea of denial to the histories of returns; in discussions of returns and restitution, the depth of these histories is neglected. For example, the British Museum participates in this by claiming that the

Parthenon Marbles were requested in 1983 when in fact the idea of their return is almost a century older. Despite claims by the British Museum that “a formal request for the permanent return to Greece of all of the Parthenon Sculptures in the Museum’s collection was first made in 1983” (“The Parthenon Sculptures” n.d.), in fact, debate about their return in British newspapers was already frequent as early as 1890s (To Give Back The Marbles: Those Which Lord Elgin Secured For England, 1890; The Elgin Marbles: Interest In Greece In the Proposed Restitution, 1890), and continued through the turn of the century. In these public debates, the question of restitution was already well-developed. The 1904, “The Ethics of Loot” article from *The Washington Post* discussed the ethics surrounding museum collections and restitution, outlining arguments which are startlingly similar to current debates over a century later. Formal debates in British Parliament over their return occurred as early as 1950, and by 1975, there was a marked increase in newspaper articles discussing returns. The claim that the conversation of restitution of the Parthenon marbles is as young as 1983, when in fact it is a century old, neglects the histories of restitution, ignoring the early discussions of return from the 1890s onward that this chapter has described. To imply that the conversation over restitution is as recent as 1983 when it is really a century older is to neglect the histories of restitution.

In a similar way, claims for the return of African cultural materials in British Museums are also framed as new despite being a century old. Restitution claims requesting the return of Benin Bronzes have been occurring for almost 100 years (Savoy 2022). Specifically, after the massacre of Benin in 1897, the British Empire had looted a large amount of materials from Benin City. These were on display in London museums within six months of the annihilation of Benin, present-day Nigeria (Hicks 2020: 65). Thirty-eight years after the British Empire violently destroyed the Kingdom of Benin, the British Lord Plymouth

visited Oba Akenzua II as Under Secretary of State for the Colonies. In this April 1935 meeting during his visit to Nigeria, the Oba first requested the restitution of two Benin throne stools (Peraldi 2017: 23), which began the movement for the return of Benin materials. Around this time the British Museum returned other materials, including “two coral crowns and a coral bead garment” that had been on display while on loan from the owner, who was the son of a member of the Benin expedition (Hicks 2020: 107). Claims for return intensified following Nigerian independence in 1960, as Nigeria requested a loan of the Queen Idia mask from the British Museum in advance of hosting the Second World Black and African Festival of Art and Culture (the FESTAC festival) (Opoku 2011). However, both the 1974 and 1976 loan requests were denied by the British Museum (Asquith et al 2020: 7). These claims for return were highly visible, as Benin materials held by the British Museum were featured in Nigerian film and on stamps (Hicks 2020: 86). Later, in the 1990s, British Labour MP Bernie Grant led a campaign in parliament for the return of Benin materials to Nigeria. Bénédicte Savoy, co-author of the Sarr-Savoy report, published on 21 November 2018, has documented this denial of the enduring histories of African appeals for repatriation in her 2022 book *Africa's Struggle for Its Art: History of a Postcolonial Defeat*, where she details how there have been calls for the return of Benin Bronzes for almost a century, yet these longstanding histories are denied and obscured.

In North America, the history of returns has its own distinct but similarly obscured history, which can trace its origins to Maria Pearson. It is because of Pearson's work as an activist in 1971 that The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) exists. Near Council Bluffs, Glenwood, Iowa, the construction of a highway unearthed the remains of 28 people. Twenty-six of these people were European Americans and two were Native American people. The two Native Americans that had

been unburied were a woman and her baby, laid to rest with some of their material possessions. The 26 Europeans were reburied in a local cemetery, but remains of the Indigenous mother and her child would be “sent to the office of the State Archaeologist for study” (Ames History Museum 2016). Maria Pearson (1932–2003), a Yankton Sioux woman, organized in direct response to this clear difference between the treatment of the human remains of Indigenous people compared to the treatment of the European human remains. She personally met with Governor Robert D. Ray in Des Moines as well as the State Archaeologist, Marshall McKusick. Her actions grew into a movement which “contributed to the formation of several organizations such as American Indians Against Desecration and the Native American Rights Fund” (Rose et al 1996: 81). She campaigned tirelessly for changes to the Iowa Burial Code in the 1970s, resulting in Iowa’s 1976 legislation (Iowa Code, Ch. 263B.7-9 & 716.5). Maria Pearson is a Nobel Peace Prize nominee. She has been called the “Founding Mother of the modern Indian repatriation movement” and “the Rosa Parks of NAGPRA” (Ames History Museum 2016).

However, this history is obscured in academic literature and is generally neglected (Bataille and Lisa 2003: 238; Ames History Museum 2016). On the same events, Rose et al (1996: 81) write:

In 1971, archeologists excavating near Glenwood, Iowa, decided to rebury 26 European American skeletons and curate two Native American skeletons in a local museum. The Native American community was upset. Subsequently, confrontations between Native Americans and archeologists in Iowa, California, and the Dakotas contributed to the formation of several organizations such as American Indians Against Desecration and the Native American Rights Fund, among others. Two decades of lobbying efforts by Native American groups resulted in passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990.

This paragraph is one of the more detailed accounts of the events of 1971 in Glenwood, Iowa; however, there are many discrepancies between the accounts told by the local community and the accounts recorded in academia. Rose et al tell us a story of archaeologists on excavation and about plans to “curate” the mother and child in a museum (1996). They do not mention that one of these people is a child. Further still, humans are referred to as objects frequently: they are “Native American skeletons” not Native American people. Unfortunately, Rose et al’s account of these events is still one of the more full accounts of the advocacy that led to NAGPRA:

On November 16, 1990, George Bush signed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, the culmination of over two decades of lobbying effort by Native American groups for the return of human remains and objects of cultural and religious significance. This event was preceded by numerous state laws and considerable federal activity. (1996: 88)

No individuals or communities are mentioned here at all, though many white archaeologists are individually named in the next section on Native Americans who were un-buried for scholarly purposes. General overviews of the history of NAGPRA do not mention the stories of Native American activism involved in the formation of this legislation; if they are alluded to, it is vaguely, without names or full recognition (evident, or not evident, in Bruner 1986, Meighan 1992, Rose et al 1996, Kakaliouras 2012). It was in this context that the term “repatriation” became popular in North America and Australia in the 80s–90s where it was mostly used to discuss the return of human remains to Indigenous communities.

Similar processes of desperately overdue recognition and treatment of Indigenous human remains as human have occurred in the Pacific. This has been through the work of groups such as the repatriation team at the Te Papa Museum in Wellington, New Zealand, and the repatriation projects from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). Some of the first human remains restitution from England back to the Pacific occurred in the late 1980s and were returns of preserved Māori tattooed heads, such as in 1988 when a sale at Bonhams auction house in London caught media attention (Benthall 1988: 1). In this case, the head was returned to New Zealand for burial instead of being sold at auction. A couple years later in 1991, Chairman of the National Museum of New Zealand Council Māui Pōmare formally requested a similar return from the Liverpool Museum (Stumpe 2005: 130). These types of human remains were some of the first returns that were widely facilitated and accepted. Given that the dehumanization of Indigenous people is a critical part of the oppression experienced during colonial rule (Fanon 1961, Freire 1968), the deliverance of Indigenous people from objecthood is crucial. With these social justice movements, Western museums were forced to “recognise that these human beings are not objects but subjects, who once upon a time possessed personhood, agency, consciousness and realness within their societies” (Ndikung 2019: 6). Through restitution, Ndikung says that the dehumanization of human remains in museums and anthropology’s historic accumulation by dispossession can be countered.

2.8 Returns as Social Justice

In recent decades there has been a shift in museological theory towards acknowledging this role of returns as an act of social justice (Sandell and Nightingale 2012; Janes 2019). This link between returns and social justice has been very clearly forged for Nazi looted materials and for human remains which are held in collections. Both of these fields of restitution are well cited and practiced, illustrating clearly how social justice can be enacted through restitution (Barkan 2001, Krmpotich 2010). However, the return of cultural materials seems to be more controversial. Generally, returns have become widely accepted for human remains and materials looted in WWII. But distinctions have

been drawn between human remains, cultural remains, “natural history” specimens, Nazi looted art, and “illicit antiquities” restitutions under UNESCO’s 1970 legislations. One of the more revealing aspects of these distinctions is between the readiness of museums to embrace human remains returns, but not cultural materials. Of course, the difference between these types of materials (ethnographical, art, funerary etc.) is assigned by the Global North, and is confusing to apply. For example, this work originally intended to study solely human remains; however, it became apparent that this distinction between human remains and material was unproductive and unhelpful for returns, and this Eurocentric boundary between human and non-human will be scrutinized. More specifically, in this particular work the second case study in Chapter Five considers both a drum and a constructed wicker head with human hair (classed by the museum as modified human remains). These delineations are not so concrete for many of the source communities that museums work with during returns, which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Five.

This writing therefore considers returns of both cultural material and human remains as a way of addressing the gap in treatment between returns of human remains in museums compared to returns of colonial spoliation. This work has a broad framing of considering human remains and easily encompasses other materials which are largely considered to have personhood, which makes room for fruitful analysis of the dominant theories of anthropological personhood and their interactions with museum practice. As such, a critical part of this research attends to the histories of how Indigenous human remains in museums came to be “delivered from objecthood” through returns (Ndikung 2019: 6), and extends this to an understanding that the same is necessary for so-called museological “objects.” More recently, restitution of material culture which is not human remains or related to WWII is now also considered with this ethical dimension, with these

restitutions also acknowledged as a powerful form of social justice (Simpson 2009, Atkinson 2010, Tythacott and Arvanitis 2014, Fouseki 2014, Ndikung 2019).

Given these longstanding histories which connect returns with social justice, it is important to emphasize that discussions of restitution are not about reciprocated violence or revenge enacted against the British Empire by emptying arts and culture institutions. Despite attempts to frame it as such, restitution is not equally as violent, nor is it a “looting” and emptying of the museums. The idea of a looted or empty museum is evident as early as 1924 in England, as Geoffrey Robertson notes that the message and image of the emptied museum was already at play as early as 1924 as, the Foreign Office² “was urging its officials not to create precedents whereby the Elgin Marbles would have to be returned, as this risked the British Museum collections being emptied” (Robertson 2019: 190). A century later, this message of concern over being emptied and “looted” is still prevalent. Felwine Sarr, one of the co-authors of the 2018 report on African restitution commissioned by the French government, commented in an interview that “the desire does not seem to be to empty museums. That is a horror scenario staged to spread fear. But it is not realistic” (Storm 2019: 2).

Central to this idea is a sort of flipped narrative. Dan Hicks describes this phenomenon in a 2020 interview, saying “there is this idea that we will end up with the British Museum closed down and exhibition spaces across the country left empty. This argument winds up suggesting museums which were intimately bound up with anti-black violence are now somehow the victims” (quoted in Styles 2020: 6). In professional practice, it is evident in the 2010 ICOM conference report on deaccession and restitution, which says that “the curator is afraid of being blamed for ‘cultural’ barbarism if he came up with a

² The Foreign Office was created in 1782 and became the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1968.

proposal for deaccessioning” (ICOM 2010a: 46). Not only does this ICOM quote reveal the conflating of deaccessioning and restitution, but these accusations illustrate a flipped narrative, or what Hicks (2020) has called *projection*. This technique of projection was a common tool in the Victorian era and is about “continual switching of positions between the powerful and the weak to create the image of white victims through mediatized violence” (Hicks 2020: 42). Despite this resistance to restitution processes, “dismantling racist monuments is not a movement to close down museums or empty out galleries” (Hicks and Mirzoeff 2020). Hicks and Mirzoeff explain how returns are not destruction or iconoclastic action, and that “some will misrepresent this disassembling as violence, but restitution and Fallism take action to bring to an end displays built to perpetuate anti-Black violence” (2020: 42).

Though there are many news articles which frame returns and restitution as a form of looting which will empty museums, there appears to be little current concern that restitutions of human remains or Nazi looted art are a form of emptying the museum. On the other hand, when discussing the return of material culture, the narrative of emptying the museum is invoked. However, this was not always the case. When NAGPRA was initially passed in 1990, many people repeated similar points of concern over the “emptying of the world’s museums.” In Bauer’s article “New Ways of Thinking About Cultural Property: A Critical Appraisal of the Antiquities Trade Debates” he notes that fears of museums emptied by human remains repatriations turned out to be largely unfounded. Generally, NAGPRA is now commonly seen as having achieved quite the opposite:

Almost two decades later, those fears have proven not only to have been largely unfounded, but NAGPRA itself is now widely seen as having opened up important new avenues for cooperation and sharing between museums and the communities whose objects they curate. (Bauer 2008: 719)

In this sense, it is therefore critical to frame these debates within the wider context of returns and to be attentive to the terms used to describe these discrete processes. With these wider contexts in mind, museums can transform from the sites which historically produced racism and instead become catalysts for social justice. In *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums*, Ruth Phillips offers a comprehensive examination of the challenges and opportunities involved in decolonizing museums and centering Indigenous voices and perspectives within museum spaces. Phillips explores the historical marginalization and misrepresentation of Indigenous cultures and peoples in Canadian museums and highlights the ways in which colonial narratives have shaped museum collections and exhibitions, often perpetuating stereotypes and erasing Indigenous agency and sovereignty. In this book, Phillips advocates for a transformative approach to museum practice, which she terms “Indigenization.” This approach involves actively engaging Indigenous communities in the interpretation and presentation of their cultural heritage, as well as challenging colonial frameworks and power dynamics within museum institutions. Drawing upon examples of innovative museum projects and collaborative initiatives with Indigenous communities, Phillips demonstrates the potential for museums to become sites of reconciliation, education, and cultural revitalization. In this sense, museums have the capacity to employ various tools and strategies to engage in the promotion of social justice. With these longstanding histories in mind, restitution can be seen as a powerful and necessary tool of social justice which can ultimately transform museums.

2.9.1 History of Disciplinary Museums

Given that restitution is a powerful tool for museums to contribute to social justice, what are the consequences of modifying museological collections through restitution? In the subsequent section, I intend to underscore how restitution has the potential to reshape

academic disciplines, transforming both collections and disciplines. Expanding on my 2022 article titled “Material Enactment of Disciplines at the University of Oxford Museums,” in the *Archaeological Review from Cambridge*, this section argues that the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology are materially defined by their collections because physical collections and disciplinary boundaries are constructed in tandem. In this sense, the concluding section of this chapter aims to offer a more localized context for anthropology within Oxford by detailing the history of disciplinary museums at the University of Oxford and exploring how restitution can change the discipline of anthropology.

Many of the materials in the University of Oxford museums were collected without distinguishing between them (Evans 1884). Human remains and cultural materials were collected in similar ways and often at the same time. Only after they entered European collections were they divided into disciplinary collections. Those divisions of material are crucial for understanding how the disciplines were also divided. In her discussion of the emergence of French museums, Hooper-Greenhill discusses how “new classifications were made and objects were made meaningful in new ways” (1992: 180). In a similar manner, and at Oxford specifically, “new subject positions were constituted through the administration and care of the newly acquired material” (Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 176). In museum collections, “the organisation of boundaries within and between museums is an important political and epistemological act” (Whitehead 2009: 11). Basically, the way knowledge is physically ordered is critical.

Though the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM), the Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH), and the Ashmolean Museum are now their own institutions at the University of Oxford, over a century ago many of these materials were held under the same roof.

Over decades, materials and collections were reclassified and physically moved between different institutions. In this case, materials were allocated to the museums of their respective disciplines, such as natural history, ethnographic/anthropological, or archaeological.

Today, the Ashmolean is the museum of art and archaeology, the PRM the museum of ethnography and anthropology, and the OUMNH for natural history and science.

However, a brief overview of their entwined histories indicates that these divisions were purposeful and indicative of the changing parameters of their respective disciplines.

First, the Ashmolean officially opened in 1683 and contained the collections of its founder Elias Ashmole and the Tradescant collections. The Ashmolean is the University of Oxford's museum of art and archaeology and features a wide range of museological materials including paintings, coins, pottery, and Roman artefacts. Up until the 1840s, most of the archaeologically recovered artefacts located in the city of Oxford were housed at the Ashmolean.

Almost 200 years later in 1886, a new museum was officially founded in Oxford. In 1850, it had been resolved that it was "desirable that a new Museum be built for a collection in illustration of Physical Science and of Natural History" (Minutes of Hebdomadal meetings 1850: 185). At the time it was simply called the University Museum and began when Dr. Henry Acland argued that there was an "entirely inadequate provision for the teaching of Natural Science" largely due to "the chaotic condition of the University's scientific collections" (Howell 2000: 739). He subsequently proposed that to improve the teaching of this subject, the university required a museum dedicated to natural history and sciences. He said this new museum should contain "all the materials explanatory of the structure of the earth, and of the organic beings placed upon it" (Howell 2000: 739). The

scattered university collections were then concentrated into the new OUMNH and collections from across the departments and colleges which were deemed scientific in nature were assembled and formally moved into the new museum.

The natural history portion of the Ashmolean was moved to the University Museum, as was Dr. Buckland's collection of fossils. The Oxford colleges also transferred their scientific collections to the museum, including the large collection of bones which was used for comparative anatomy and physiology at Christ Church College. In this way, the collections of the museums at the University of Oxford began to take shape. The Ashmolean began to define itself as purely art and archaeology while the University Museum was solely for natural history. Though most materials had previously been held in one central museum (the Ashmolean) or in individual departments and colleges, they were now being dispersed into unique disciplinary museums. As Arthur Evans, the keeper of the Ashmolean from 1884–1908, announced at the opening of the current site of the Ashmolean, "By the decision of the University to unify the Archaeological collections, the smaller antiquarian objects, at present scattered amongst our many public Institutions, will find a place within our walls" (Evans 1884). The University Museum existed in this form until 1995, when a committee was tasked to review "the organisation, staffing and management of the museum, its relationship with other bodies, its roles in teaching, curation and research, and its obligations to its local, national and international public; and to make recommendations" (University Museum Of Natural History 2007). As a result of this review, the University Museum was officially renamed the Oxford University Museum of Natural History in 1996.

The next museum in the history of Oxford's museums was the Pitt Rivers Museum which became a university museum in 1884. This museum is now known as the museum of

anthropology and ethnography and originally stemmed from the weapons collection of Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers. This collection of about 22,000 objects was originally established as the ethnographic department of the OUMNH and is still housed in the same building. The PRM received many items deemed to be “ethnographic in content” from around the university, including almost all of the ethnological materials from the Ashmolean and a large portion of the Ashmolean’s original foundational Tradescant collection.

Once the three museums were established, the collections of these museums continued to change. Contrary to the popular belief that museums are stagnant collections (Weil 1997a), the boundaries of collections continue to shift and in this case these transfers between collections were not single movements. In the following years materials continued to be repositioned into what was deemed the correct museum. For example, in 1884 the Ashmolean received more materials from the OUMNH, the Taylorian building, and the Bodleian Library, including a complete collection of coins from the Bodleian (MacGregor 1997: 607). During this time, collections from the many colleges of Oxford continued to be subsumed into the appropriate museum, such as when the Christ Church collections dispersed some of the Cook Voyage materials to the PRM, while most of Christ Church’s human remains collection went to OUMNH. What had before appeared to be a “chaotic” organization of collections now converged into formal and deliberate categories. The movements of these materials were not arbitrary or by chance but are indicative of the changing parameters of these respective disciplines; as each museum was created, so too were their respective disciplines constructed. As such, these museums and their collections reflect their fields of study as the formation of these institutions occurred simultaneously alongside the construction of the limits of each discipline and its respective materials.

This formal connection between discipline and collection occurred at each museum. For example, not only did anthropologists actively work out of the PRM, but the PRM was also the site of educating future anthropologists in the university and defining the discipline. The connection between discipline and museum is not a retrospectively applied idea, but was in fact one of the main justifications for the museum's founding (Larson 2008). Further, as discussed, the OUMNH was specifically formed to support the education provided for the natural sciences at the university. In the official meeting to establish the OUMNH on May 1, 1849, the convocation followed with Henry Acland's proposal that the museum would naturally require the appropriate associated teaching provisions, and it was resolved that in order to establish "a School of Natural Science it is desirable that a general University Museum be formed with distinct departments under one roof, together with lecture rooms and all such appliances as may be found necessary for teaching and studying the natural history of the earth and its inhabitants" (Berry 2004: 225). Thus, the OUMNH was officially associated with the study of the natural sciences, and the PRM was formally associated with ethnology, anthropology, and anthropological material culture studies. Today, the Ashmolean is still used by Oxford's archaeological department as well as multiple other departments, and is also associated with the Griffith Institute of Egyptology.

Ultimately, the University of Oxford museums eventually solidified themselves as the museums of their respective subject areas. The reclassification of these materials was not by chance or unrelated to these disciplines; instead, the parameters of the museum's physical collections reflect the limits of their disciplines: when the University received materials excavated from Troy to Oxford in 1892, the materials were split into their constructed categories. The cities of Troy were classed chronologically with materials

from the earliest stratigraphy of the city, named Troy I and II, held at the PRM as anthropological. Materials from the later city, Troy III, are held at the Ashmolean, as archaeological. The 68–75 objects from Troy are classed as Bronze Age and Iron Age and now held in the Ashmolean, while the 200 objects in the PRM are considered Stone Age/Mesolithic. Here a single site is cut in half to distinguish between the discipline assigned to each. Therefore, the disciplinary boundaries between archaeology and anthropology are not imagined divides, but very real physical divisions which are made visible through the separation of materials in museological collections. Though many see divides between disciplines as arbitrary or insubstantial (Perry and Beale 2015), these divisions are both epistemological and material (Hooper-Greenhill 1992). Ultimately, understanding the divisions of these materials are crucial for understanding how the disciplines were also divided.

2.9.2 Implications of the Disciplinary Museum

There are deep and ongoing implications for these very real physical divides created between archaeology, anthropology, heritage, and natural sciences, especially for human remains. This ongoing reclassification event at the University of Oxford illuminates the implications of these Eurocentric categorizations. For example, in these historic divisions, “British archaeological collections remained at the Ashmolean Museum” (Petch and Larson 2006: 2) while non-British archaeological collections went to the Pitt Rivers Museum. The outcome of these choices reflects how most Indigenous archaeological collections were made to be ethnographic and anthropological, in contrast to how British archaeological collections held the status of art and archaeology. This divide created between archaeology and anthropology illuminates much about what was chosen to be archaeological and what was chosen to be anthropological.

This split between the PRM and the Ashmolean is the most crucial of the divides. Larson notes that for the Ashmolean and PRM museums, “one would specialise in ‘civilized’ cultures, and the other in ‘primitive’ societies” (2008: 98). With the creation of the PRM at Oxford in 1884, the museums created the divide between the primitive and the European through the separations made by the PRM and the Ashmolean. This new Victorian racism was a crucial creation for the empire between 1880–1920, with these museums and disciplines constructing themselves at the founding creational moments. In this sense, biological races were constructed by European scholarship and European institutions during this time. In the 2000 book *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, Gilroy discussed this creation of the idea of race and challenged the notion of race as a natural or fixed category, instead highlighting its historical and social construction. He argued that race functions as a mechanism of power and domination, used to justify systems of oppression and exploitation. Gilroy’s argument draws heavily on European and British contexts, but neglects the North American context, which may not align neatly with Gilroy’s transnational framework. Gilroy’s work risks overlooking the unique historical and social dynamics of race in North America such as the legacy of slavery, segregation, and ongoing racial inequalities. More generally, while Gilroy contends that the concept of race is becoming increasingly irrelevant in contemporary society, scholars such as Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* from 2010 argue that race continues to exert a profound influence on individuals’ experiences and opportunities. Structural racism persists across various institutions, including education, criminal justice, and healthcare, leading to disparities that cannot be explained solely by class or nationality. However, for this British context, Gilroy’s argument is evident in these divisions which were made by the academic discipline and enacted in the material

divisions between museums, ultimately creating and enforced racism by making some materials and their cultures “civilised” and some “primitive.”

As argued by Hooper-Greenhill, to be included in a certain disciplinary museum also meant that the materials would be viewed and known in a certain way, depending on the perspective of the field of study (1992). In the case of the PRM, Pitt-Rivers himself noted that the museum and pedagogies of ethnology and anthropology were “collected with a view of demonstrating certain principles of evolution” (Pitt-Rivers 1880: 125). The museum is famous for its display style, which groups materials by type rather than by time or region. This typological display is meant to lend itself to comparative study and Pitt Rivers himself intended this to show a type of evolution in cultures. In the museum, chronological contemporaries could be displayed as a part of a cultural evolution; for example a display of Pitt-Rivers’ original collection of weapons presents a scale of evolution with an African spear at one devolved end, and the European gun on the highest scale of evolution, regardless of their coeval existence. The implications of this type of display show certain cultures as lower on an evolutionary framework. This naturally affects how the discipline of anthropology and ethnography was constructed as they relied heavily on these materials. As materials at the Ashmolean are not organized into this evolutionary display, they can more easily escape the explicit narratives that are created by this type of arrangement. This physical partitioning meant some things were displayed with this constructed racist evolutionary temporality, rather than the chronological temporality often found in the Ashmolean and its art and archaeology.

The distinctions between archaeology and anthropology reinforce each other. At the inaugural lecture of the opening of the Ashmolean on its current site, the Keeper of the Museum, Arthur Evans illustrated this by noting that archaeology as a discipline

necessitates that anthropology is positioned as the unevolved primitive when he said that to understand the “earlier Archaeological periods... the student turns at every step for his enlightenment to the analogies of existing savage life” (1884: 2). Evans discusses what he considers an “overlap” between the fields, which occurs when archaeologists turn to anthropology to find “living examples” of archaeological discoveries in “the savage races of the most distant Continents” (1884: 2). However, this is not an overlap but merely a reinforcement of the boundaries of these disciplines defined as primitive versus civilized, with all the attendant chronopolitics.

These physical classifications help construct what occurs within the disciplines, as they shift concurrently. The reason for this fundamental carving up of artefacts and disciplines is directly related to its historical context; for Oxford specifically, these divides are due to the key moments of empire, mirroring the 1884 Berlin Conference which was held the same year as the founding of the PRM and the movement of the Ashmolean to its current site. However, the legacies of these disciplines do not have to be uncritically reproduced; some can be rejected in order to make way for new orderings of knowledge. For example, it becomes critical to consider which discipline human remains are categorized under. Regarding the amount of humans in these three Oxford museums, at the PRM specifically there are 2894 separate human remains, or almost 3000 unburied people. According to the PRM, the museum collections contain human body parts from around the world: Europe (993), Asia (578), Africa (462), Oceania (513), Americas (270), and 78 without any recorded provenance (Critical Changes n.d.). These numbers are not fully accurate, however, as there are discrepancies. For example, there is also a list made available on the PRM website that is a list of all the human remains from Australia and Oceania, but this list only contains 478 listed remains, while the website states there are 513. According to the PRM, these lists “include not only skeletal human remains but

any object containing human tissue, such as hair or skin” (“Human Remains at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford,” n.d). According to these inventories, nine of the 478 human remains from Australia and Oceania cannot be located.

The Ashmolean reports approximately 220 human body parts, and a cursory search of the OUMNH indicates 1365 items classified as from the taxonomic species of “sapiens.” The large amount of human remains in the PRM seems to suggest that some human remains are considered more anthropological and ethnographic than any other subject grouping. When disciplines and collections are separated in this manner they are treated differently depending on which category they are assigned. For example, there are vast differences between how human remains are displayed in each field and museum. As discussed, the typological displays of the PRM create differences between how cultural materials are perceived. This is even more relevant when considering human remains. Primarily, the PRM does not display human remains to the public as of July 2020, a policy not shared by the Ashmolean and the OUMNH. For example, the Ashmolean museum prominently displays their Egyptian mummies and the OUMNH displays the “Red Lady” of Paviland. Depending on what discipline human remains were classified into, a different policy governs those human bodies.

In her discussion of the emergence of French museums, Hooper-Greenhill discusses how “new classifications were made and objects were made meaningful in new ways” (1992: 180). In a similar manner, and at Oxford specifically, “new subject positions were constituted through the administration and care of the newly acquired material” (Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 176). In museum collections, “the organisation of boundaries within and between museums is an important political and epistemological act” (Whitehead 2009: 11). However, there is a deeper issue at hand relating to how these

subjects have been divided. This is an issue relating to how human remains have been used in these disciplines and their collections more generally. The key connection here is with the invention of liberal humanism in relation to the museum. Orderings of knowledge are powerful; like the physical limits of collections and disciplines, the exhibit and the catalogue of the museum are also tools of organizing knowledge. In this vein, Hooper-Greenhill connected her ideas of a “disciplinary museum” with Foucault in 1992. Drawing on her work, disciplines here can be thought of in the punishing way that Foucault defined them: as methods that divided and controlled time, space, and movement (Foucault 1982). Some of these outcomes can be violent, such as the racist cranial displays, but some can also be used to construct knowledge in other potent ways. There is a vision of anthropology that directly enacts this violence, for example in DNA testing and the creation of race sciences. However, there is also a similar violence enacted in how the anthropological museum is structured.

2.9.3 Reshaping the Museum

Within these divides, further issues exist because of how human remains within the ethnological and anthropological museum supported specific ideas of evolution. Formerly, museums used cranial displays to demonstrate racial hierarchies. However, even without these displays, the creation of narratives of racism is also evident in the modern museum such as in the PRM’s technological evolutionism. To situate this within historical context, before Darwin or the single-origin model, the debate was between monogenists and polygenists. Polygenism argued that different races were biologically different, with different origins, compared to the monogenist single-origin model which stated all humans had the same origin and were therefore biologically the same. The arguments of the 1850s were between those attempting to create a scientific racism and those who argued for this monogenist model. The study of human remains, and

specifically skulls, was crucial to these debates. Anthropologists such as Samuel Morton used human skulls from collections to create the ideas of biological inferiority or superiority, using what they called craniometry. But the new monogenist perspective counteracted the extremely racist arguments of the time which posited different biological origins of humans. For anthropology specifically, the monogenist model seemed to be a solution to many of the issues facing the subject: the monogenist model argued against these racist cranial displays and racism in general.

Ryan Jobson names this phenomenon the “Boasian Fix” (2020: 265). His concept of the Boasian fix refers to a critique of the legacy of Franz Boas, an anthropologist known for his rejection of racial determinism and his advocacy for cultural relativism and empiricism. Jobson argues that while Boasian anthropology has made significant strides in challenging racial hierarchies and promoting cultural diversity, it has also become somewhat stagnant or fixed in its approach to understanding and representing non-Western societies. According to Jobson, the “Boasian fix” suffers from universalizing tendencies, methodological rigidity, and a lack of engagement with power, leading to a flattening of cultural diversity and the reproduction of colonial power dynamics while placing limitations on the ability of anthropologists to engage with Indigenous epistemologies. By focusing primarily on cultural differences and linguistic diversity, Boasian anthropology may overlook the broader political and economic contexts that shape social relations and cultural practices.

After this turn towards monogenism, the argument became that between humans, the difference is cultural, not biological. Pitt-Rivers was heavily influenced by Darwin and Spencer; he continued the idea of evolutionary development not in the species of nature, but in cultural materials. This is the model now evident in the PRM. Darwin’s 1859

publication heavily influenced many disciplines, but also Pitt-Rivers specifically, who created and curated his collection under the monogenist model and applied the ideas of evolution. However, he also applied this evolutionary model to cultural materials. Here, he attempted to provide proof of these cultural differences through his displays, which he described as showing “the successive ideas by which the minds of men in a primitive condition of culture have progressed in the development of their arts from the simple to the complex” (Pitt-Rivers 1874). Materials held in the museum were used to order knowledge in such a way that created these divides.

The separations between biology and culture meant that cranial exhibits which showed a range from inferior to superior in the exhibits which created racism were removed from museum display after WWII; however, exhibits which used cultural materials to show technological evolutions were not. The divides created here between the disciplines and the collections mean that the racism created by the cultural evolutionism typological displays made by Pitt-Rivers are largely ignored because he was not prominently employing the racist polygenist narrative found in collections such as Samuel Morton’s. Within the PRM, evolution was not represented by materials from one time period and then moving into the next within the same culture, but the concurrent materials of different cultures displayed on a scale of evolution designed by white Europeans. This time warping was even evident in the former designation of the PRM as the Department of Ethnology and Prehistory in 1958 (Jones 1991: 17). Again, the entire collection was classified as “prehistory,” forever altering how the materials were situated in time. This label was, of course, a form of chronopolitics where the museum alters time, labeling certain materials from the 1800s as “prehistory” not because of the time period, but solely because of the culture they were taken from.

However, the solution is not a combined mega-discipline nor the undisciplined work suggested by many (e.g. Tilley and Miller 1996, Miller 1997, Thomas 1991, Sayer 1999, Tilley 2006). This push for anti-disciplinary slush came from researchers who argued that we must move beyond our disciplines (Miller 1997) yet still came back to a single discipline (Miller 2008, 2019). This type of thinking argued that disciplines were a constraint. However, as Strathern has noted, disciplinary work and awareness is crucial for “clarity in the contingency of the knowledge we create” (Strathern 2004: 5 in Hicks 2010: 94). Here there is a role for the disciplines; disciplines can be re-formed and physically re-shaped through the collections, as physical manifestations of the disciplines. Understanding how knowledge is created and shaped by disciplines is important. In this vein, intellectually this section serves to remind that these disciplines are physically manifest in museological collections regardless of changing an academic perspective or using a different research method. An altered lens does not tangibly move the boundaries of these visible manifestations of disciplines. However, if the disciplines have been, and continue to be, physically shaped by their collections, then they can also be tangibly re-shaped in the same way that they were created. In this way, we can begin to order the disciplines with museological collections, but in a different way. If we were to re-order these disciplines by moving materials, there is an opportunity for undoing the disciplines, instead of rekindling their histories.

More simply, there is an opportunity here to physically re-shape the disciplines with our materials. What if we moved the Peruvian mummies from their “primitive” classification in the anthropological PRM and into the “civilised” classification of the archaeological Ashmolean? How might anthropology be redefined to move beyond its colonial traditions by the addition of contemporary African art alongside African anthropological artefacts? In 2018 the Royal Academy of Arts in London exhibited anthropological materials from

Oceania alongside contemporary Oceanic art, combining ethnographic collections and works from contemporary artists. In this sense, the actions and tools which the museum uses to change their collections, such as loans, commissions, movements, and restitutions, could also re-shape the disciplines. There are crucial implications for human remains with this physical re-ordering: when knowledge is re-ordered, there may no longer be room for human remains. Once these universal orderings are restructured, what happens to the remains of those disciplinary orderings? How would anthropology and archaeology as disciplines be reconstructed if the human remains in their collections were buried? In this sense, restitution can act as a key tool for changing the discipline of anthropology.

These divides are not fabric curtains which are easy to brush aside when they become inconvenient but very physically designated divergences in the material divides of museological collections. Ultimately, these divisions are powerful; they can be violent but they can also be useful. Their physicality provides an opportunity to completely restructure our disciplines through alterations of physical collections, rethinking the boundaries of these divisions by reorganizing the material manifestations of those borders provides an opportunity for more ethical disciplines. This examination of the history of the material enactment of the disciplines serves to highlight that the strict physical divides of the disciplines that are enacted by museological collections should not be combined and blended together, but instead used to define a new future for the disciplines. In this vein, materials are entangled with their disciplines; to understand the materials requires a deep analysis of the theories which command those materials. This work looks at the intersections of returns and anthropological theory mainly because of this unique entanglement. As such, to understand returns and dispossession, this work

considers how returns might act as a powerful tool for museums to change how our disciplines and theory function.

2.10 Conclusions

Given that returns can be a powerful tool to counter anthropological accumulation by dispossession and to change our discipline, this dissertation therefore returns back to this Pacific literature to reflect on these ideas through case studies with specific attention to the role of these ideas in cultural dispossession and restitution. In an optimistic manner, this dissertation asks how *The Gift* and the dispossession of the Pacific be aligned. In the following chapters, I look specifically to anthropologists like Marilyn Strathern, who had also considered material exchange in the Pacific and posited that exchange systems contain a type of cutting and separation, may provide an effective route with which to consider a theory of dispossession (Strathern 2005a, 2005b).

Further, Susanne Küchler wrote extensively on *Malangan*, which she describes as a type of ceremonial exchange system practiced by the people of New Ireland, an island in Papua New Guinea. In her research, Küchler emphasized the significance of Malangan ceremonies as complex social events that involve the exchange of gifts, particularly intricately carved wooden objects. These ceremonies play a vital role in the social, political, and economic life of the community, serving to establish and reinforce social relationships, express status, and commemorate significant events such as funerals. Using the Malangan example, Küchler explored conceptualizations of memory, decay, and gift-to-god systems, which might be helpful to expand our understanding (1987, 1988, 1997). Additionally, Anette Weiner's 1992 book *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* had developed Mauss' ideas of the spirit of the gift to consider "inalienable possessions." Her specific example of the Trobriand Kula is used to argue that even when certain gifts are given, they are not truly alienated. These ideas

present valuable opportunities to reassess the application of Pacific anthropology's gift theory for restitution.

Framing the systematic colonial collecting of material culture as gifts challenges restitution. However, if Mauss' theories and its descendants are considered with more attention to the extractive power of the British Empire in the Pacific, his work could also illuminate how "the spirit of the gift" might be reapplied to deepen our understanding of restitution of materials from museums. Mauss' endnote about theft says that "It is this *hau* that avenges the person suffering the theft which takes possession of the thief, casts a spell on him, and leads him to death or obliges him to make restitution" (Mauss translated by Halls 1990: 90). Another English translation of this note says: "the sanction against theft is the mystical effect of the mana of the object stolen; moreover, the object is surrounded by taboos and marked by its owner, and has *hau*, spiritual power, as a result. This *hau* avenges theft, controls the thief, bewitches him and leads him to death or constrains him to restore the object" (Mauss translated by Cunnison 1954: 86). This idea implies that these material exchanges provide an opportunity to consider an obligation to make restitution. Though Mauss' focus on gifts has currently been used to frame extraction as gifting, maybe they might also offer an opportunity to illuminate how anthropology might respond to our current disciplinary crisis.

The specific connection I would like to make in this dissertation is that considering these key anthropological concepts of this school of thought can actually help to better understand dispossession and cultural restitution. Ultimately, some of these anthropological treatments of material exchange have potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of cultural restitution. Mauss' *Essay on the Gift* is more than anything about reciprocity and our debts to each other. What is cultural restitution if it is not

reciprocity and a paying of a debt? Therefore I am revisiting this literature, which, despite its past role in diverting attention from discussions about returns, may also offer a better understanding of how we conceptualize restitution. Ultimately, the focus on entangling objects distracts from the challenge facing anthropological collections today: understanding the disentangling of these objects.

As such, this research looks to identify dispossession in the archival documents of three case studies of restitutions from the Pitt Rivers Museum and attempts to understand how anthropological theory can help better understand that dispossession. This chapter has provided the research context for this dissertation and in the next chapter I outline the research approach and provide a chapter outline.

Chapter 3: Research Approach

3.1 The Fragmented Archive

This dissertation is asking questions about dispossession in the archives related to three returns from the PRM, and using anthropological literature to answer those questions.

For this research, dispossession is identified by focusing on how dispossession occurs through the deprivation of information. Given that this dispossession is about more than just the extraction of material resources, this dissertation places the dispossession of information and knowledge at the forefront of its approach. During a visit to the Oxford University Museum of Natural History a few months ago, a curator remarked to me that they would not be able to help my research much. He said there was a “big black hole” in their archive for the time period I was interested in. I was not surprised. All researchers who use archives know about “the big black hole” in the archives: there is too little information recorded, too much information lost to time. This lack of information makes any sort of archival research difficult. Therefore, this research looks at what those gaps in the archive are and how they influence museum practice. In this way, I ask, why is there no information? What historical narratives are supported by the exclusion of certain information? How do these gaps demonstrate dispossession?

To answer this research question, this work explores three case studies which each center around a return made from the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) in Oxford. In each case, I look at the story of the return and consider what has been taken away, diminished, negated, or made to disappear. The focus here is on what is subtracted—information removed as a tangible manifestation of dispossession, identifiable and open to exploration within the documented histories of the archives of

museums and anthropology. Other scholars have previously investigated the archival gaps discussed in this dissertation. Drawing inspiration from their work, this thesis aims to develop an approach that explores the influence of anthropological material culture theory, archives, and museums on our perspectives regarding returns. In this context, the research explores the impact of anthropology and its institutions in obscuring the understanding of returns, encompassing all written aspects tied to archive materials, labels, related emails, and even inscriptions on the materials themselves. This definition of the archive further includes the related document files, database information, metadata as well as cultural materials, human remains, displays, correspondence, and publications. In this chapter, I analyze the existing research conducted by scholars investigating colonial archives and gaps within colonial archives and explore the methodologies these scholars employ to address these archival gaps, highlighting how their work has influenced my own approach.

To start, it's important to note the archive is fragmented. In 1995, anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot wrote *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. In this book Trouillot introduces the concept of “silences” in history, referring to the deliberate or unintentional exclusion of certain voices, events, or perspectives from historical narratives. In a similar manner to this work, Trouillot is looking at how the archive represents violent encounters. He uses examples of the Haitian Revolution and Columbus’s encounter with the Indigenous peoples of the Americas to argue that these silences often serve the interests of those in power. In more recent years, scholarship on this subject from Ariella Aïsha Azoulay in her 2019 book *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* similarly argues that archives, as traditionally conceived, often reinforce imperialistic perspectives by selectively preserving and presenting certain narratives while marginalizing or silencing others. As such, the boundaries, structure, and

processes of the archive all contribute to the creation of these historical narratives. In this case, the colonial archives were constructed to form historical narratives which support British colonialism. Trouillot and Azoulay's ideas form the groundwork for this dissertation's approach, acknowledging that the archive contributes to a distorted understanding of the past.

The work of Ann Laura Stoler also holds a significant influence on this work's approach to identifying dispossession in archives. Stoler wrote *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* in 2016, where she explores the use of the archive primarily in the French colonial context. She introduces the concept of "duress" as a lens to understand the persistent, lasting, and sometimes intangible constraints imposed by colonial histories on present-day realities. Key to this dissertation is her emphasis on understanding that the impact of colonial histories is often subtle and ingrained in current conditions. Stoler's work explores the challenges in recognizing and understanding these connections, addressing the limitations of existing analytical tools and the need for what she calls "methodological renovations" in order to unveil the enduring effects of colonial duress. Following in the vein of Trouillot and Azoulay, Stoler (2016) demonstrates how the histories of empire hide in the shadows of the archive, noting that archives rely heavily on their power to *exclude* information in order to form these powerful historical narratives. Stoler's definitions of duress allow for an approach to the imperial power dynamics that can fully encompass the violent and temporal aspects of the colonial experience. In this sense, investigating moments of duress requires attention to all three aspects of Stoler's duress, which she describes as such:

[Duress] capture[s] three principal features of colonial histories of the present: the hardened, tenacious qualities of colonial effects; their extended protracted temporalities; and, not least, their durable, if sometimes intangible constraints and confinements. Duress, durability, and duration in this work all share a politically inflected and afflicted historical etymology. But endurance figures here,

as well, in the capacity to “hold out” and “last,” especially in its activated verb form, “to endure,” as a countermand to “duress” and its damaging and disabling qualities. (Stoler 2016: 7)

This work will borrow Stoler’s definition of duress and seek to identify moments of pressure and duress within each case study. It will also build on Stoler’s approach to addressing these nuanced and subtle influences of colonial histories, which is to define occlusions. Stoler describes occlusions as “categories, concepts, and ways of knowing that disable linkages to imperial practice” and any “acts of obstruction—of categories, concepts, and ways of knowing that disable linkages to imperial practice.” (2016: 10). Following Stoler’s lead, this research treats “occlusions as subjects of inquiry in their own right” (2016: 10). Moreover, Stoler argues that gaps and occlusions are not simply areas for further provenance research, but a chance to consider why this information was excluded and how its exclusion shapes historiographical narratives. Stoler describes occlusions by pointing out that they are not “an accidental byproduct of imperial formations ... They are not just neglected, overlooked, or forgotten” (2016: 10). She describes this function as the method by which “colonial entailments may lose their visible and identifiable presence in the vocabulary, conceptual grammar, and idioms of current concerns” (2016: 4). The occlusions are shaping forces, expressed by Stoler as “a line drawn in the construction of a figure that is missing from the finished product” (2016: 10). In a practical sense this can manifest even in benign mislabelings (2016: 10). This work borrows this definition of occlusions, using the identification of occlusions as a method to recognize dispossession. This research will seek to identify these occlusions and illuminate their workings. Again, the aim is to consider what has been taken away, diminished, negated, or made to disappear. The focus here is on what is subtracted. Stoler cautions to not treat these black holes as accidents; the information is not just missing, but deliberately excluded from the archive (2016). These conceptualizations of

occlusion and duress are the primary methods in this dissertation's approach for comprehending the functioning of dispossession. Given the fragmented nature of the archive, this dissertation necessitates a specific and meticulous approach for this project. Stoler argued that engaging with the fragmented archive requires methodological renovations. As such, this work grapples with this fragmentation by using an approach which places occlusions as subjects of inquiry in their own right.

This study draws insights from multiple authors addressing archival gaps. However, in terms of method, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's ideas form the basis of the third critical area of dissertations approach. As discussed, the concepts of occlusions and duress are the first two concepts that will be identified in each case study; the third area of identification takes after Tuck and Yang's work on "moves to innocence" in "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" from 2012. In this case, this dissertation will identify in each case study the moves to innocence that are propagated and which affect how we conceive of the violent harvesting of materials from the Global South for museums. Moves to innocence are defined by Tuck and Yang as narrative shifts which deflect complicity in colonial settings. Tuck and Yang describe this idea as "*settler* moves to innocence" and apply these ideas to Canada and the settler colonialism experienced there. However, I will apply this idea outside of the settler colonial framework, more broadly considering moves to innocence in the extractive colonial context. For the purpose of this work, moves to innocence are attempts to move the oppressor to a position of innocence. This is not the same as identifying occlusions. Instead, moves to innocence are found in the positioning of historical narratives. More specifically, "moves to innocence are those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (Tuck and Yang 2012: 10). In this way, this work will seek

these occlusions, points of duress, and moves to innocence associated with each of the three case studies.

These writings by Stoler and Tuck and Yang provide concrete definitions of concepts which this work will seek to identify across three case studies. However, this writing is also influenced by learning from scholars working on similar problems with archival gaps. There is a large amount of literature which also explores this phenomenon, noting that the loss of information in colonial archives is common (Hartman 2008, Fuentes 2016, Wagner 2017). There are many approaches to this problem. In the subsequent three works, while recognizing these gaps, each scholar adopted a distinct approach to address the archival black holes: Kim Wagner tackled this problem in *The Skull of Alum Bheg*, a 2017 book focusing on a specific artifact—a skull—taken as a war trophy during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. The book provides a detailed account of the events surrounding the rebellion, examining the motivations behind the act of collecting human remains as trophies. While writing this historical exploration, Wagner noted that his research had to “trace an outline of Alum Bheg against his archival absence” (2017: 7). He also goes on to note that working with “this fragmentary evidence obviously has to be used with great care and the usual caveats concerning issues of translation and the power dynamics inherent to the colonial archive must be kept in mind” (2017: 7). For Wagner, the fragmented archive was worked around, continuing an engagement with the archive but not with the archival gaps.

In a contrasting approach, Marisa Fuentes wrote *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (2016) where she examined the lives of enslaved women in the Caribbean and provided a nuanced understanding of the impact of slavery on individuals, families, and communities. In this book, Fuentes described a corrupted

archive and emphasized the need to consider alternative sources and methodologies to reconstruct the lives of enslaved women. For Fuentes, her approach involved embracing the gaps in the archive. Lastly, in a creative approach to these gaps, Saidiya Hartman confronted the fragmented archive with her method of critical fabulation in 2008. Her idea from “Venus in Two Acts” (2008), suggested that researchers can think beyond the archive and critically fabulate histories. In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019), Hartman uses this approach to fabulate vibrant stories from an archive which normally does not allow for a detailed historical narrative. This creative approach to fragmented archives is effective for Hartman; however, I would like to note here that this approach will not be employed in this research because I am white woman researching at Oxford University and it is not for me to tell the stories of deliberately marginalized and under-served communities. Instead, my focus is on the fragmentation of the archive and the dispossession which comes with it. However, Hartman reminds us that “every historian of the multitude, the dispossessed, the subaltern, and the enslaved is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known” (2019: xiii). As Hartman says, all researchers who use archives must tackle the fragmented archive; therefore, an approach that engages with the fractured nature of the archive is needed. The information relating to human remains in museums is as fragmented as the bodies themselves. Therefore, this work intends to confront the deliberate “big black hole” in the archive directly, by identifying occlusions, duress, and moves to innocence across three case studies of returns from the PRM.

Finally, within the dominant anthropological methods it is easy to center collectors in the story. This is because institutions in the Global North simply will have more recorded information about the colonizer than the colonized—information which is needed to form a narrative. This fragmentation is the key to this dissertation. The method applied here

seeks to confront this problem head-on by following Stoler and treating the fragmentation as a subject of inquiry in its own right. But this may still be inadequate in working against over-representing the extractive collectors. As such, Fallism is methodologically relevant to this effort. Fallism sits on the other side of the same coin as restitution, and together they have been called the “twin movements” of current transatlantic civil rights (Hicks and Mirzoeff 2020). In Fallism campaigns like Rhodes Must Fall, colonial extractors are centered without glorification. In this case, the community-led movement declared that Cecil Rhodes should no longer be commemorated by a statue due to his connections to the slave trade and systemic racism. Previously, men like Rhodes were centered in the narrative in a way that glorified their work. However, the Rhodes Must Fall campaign has centered Rhodes in a way which challenges this veneration. Rhodes Must Fall has been able to center Cecil Rhodes, not in the way that Oriel College has, but in a way which directly confronts dispossession. To center the collectors in the way that Rhodes Must Fall has is to interrogate the plinth instead of the statue. As such, instead of giving voice to the underrepresented, this dissertation is criticizing what is over-represented.

Given the fragmented nature of the archive, this dissertation necessitates a specific approach to this project which places missing information at the forefront of study. Therefore, this work will seek these occlusions, points of duress, and moves to innocence associated with each of the three case studies. Primarily, these occlusions and moves to innocence will be identified in the archives of the PRM.

3.2 Defining the Archive

Since this study utilizes archival materials to investigate the research question, the development of the archive holds significant importance within this dissertation. In the

following section, I explore the physical organization of the archive, its accessibility, and various perspectives and methodologies for engaging with its contents. The museum has always been a mixture of materials, documents about those materials, and historical archives. The founding collections of Elias Ashmole at the Ashmolean in Oxford contained both materials as well as libraries of historic documents, as did Hans Sloane's founding donations to the British Museum. These donated documents were not strictly archives, but contributed to the larger idea of the connectedness of knowledge and scholarship. As museums grew, so did their records and the understanding of the importance of keeping their own records; an archive of their material archive. The museum archive movement of the 1970s formalized this museological priority. These types of archives have been created within an institution wherein historical texts are chosen, new texts created, and certain texts excluded. In the PRM archive, a choice has been made about which emails should be printed and stored in a certain Related Document File (RDF). The decision to print out certain emails deemed relevant is a part of institutional archival practice as these choices have been made and culminate in a specific representation in the archive. Many of these collections of documents in museums are the product of informal practices of institutional archiving, wherein museum staff simply make decisions. Ultimately, the relationship between archive and material is forged by the institution.

So what is an archive exactly? In "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression" (1995) Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz explore the concept of the archive and its implications for memory, history, and culture and discuss the paradoxes inherent in archives, emphasizing the simultaneous drives for conservation and destruction. As *Archive Fever* is situated within the broader intellectual milieu of poststructuralism and deconstruction, they define the archive as being both the guardian, the law, and the

physical building of the archive. Yet, for most historians using archival sources, the archive is considered as solely a body of documents and the buildings that house them. These can be read in a certain archaeological way. In this vein, we can look to Mbembe (2012) and the ways in which the architecture of the archive has power. In "The Power of the Archive and its Limits," Mbembe is also cognizant of the gaps, silences, and omissions within historical archives, which often result from deliberate acts of erasure or neglect, reflecting power imbalances and the suppression of certain voices. Regarding the physical structure of the archive, Mbembe describes buildings and architecture as tools which play key roles in the power dynamics of archives (2012: 19). In this sense, the buildings, file storage, and architectural style all influence how we can consider dispossession in this dissertation. Further, in "Towards an Archaeology of Archaeological Archives," Baird and McFadyen also write that how the archive is organized, labeled and accessed have "a direct relationship to the creation, form and possibilities of archaeological knowledge" (Baird and McFadyen 2014: 16). In this context, it is essential to examine the structures and physical aspects of the archive. Due to the unique formation processes at the University of Oxford there are also many documents that might be relevant to a museological collection that are found in other archival spaces at the university. As discussed in Chapter Two, the OUMNH and Christ Church College archives all have documents which are pertinent to PRM collections due to the unique nature of the transferring process which formed the University of Oxford museums. These physicalities are equally important to consider the structure of the archive. For the PRM specifically, using ideas from Mbembe and Baird and McFadyen, positioning the archive as a site of representation to be explored is helpful for understanding the physical manifestation of the archive. As such, here I will instead briefly describe how the archives at the PRM function. At the PRM, the archives are held in a few ways:

A) The related document files (RDF): These files are stored in cabinets in the staff-only area of PRM museum, inside the research room (see image A). As shown in the image, these files are carefully stored in large metal cabinets and are sorted according to the object number. To see these files, you have to make an appointment, and email the collections department. When an individual contacts the PRM, it is helpful to know the object numbers for the materials you are requesting, so some prior research must be done. The documents will be pulled for you by a staff member and laid out in preparation for the individual who is requesting access if they can physically come to the PRM in Oxford, England unless alternate virtual access can be organized. As evident from the photograph, there are procedures in place which protect the documents, including book stands and plastic folders.

B) The director's files: These files are often in active use by the director, and while RDF files might at some point be held with the director's files, because of this physical change in place, special requests might have to be made to see them. There is no inherent classification for the director's files.

C) Named papers, which are collections of documents relating to specific individuals, such as Henry Balfour or Beatrice Blackwood for example.

D) The online collections database, which was updated during the writing of this dissertation. This database is hosted through the PRM website, but before accessing it there is a disclaimer about sensitive or outdated materials. The website also allows a choice to view the sanitized version which excludes the

violence of the documentation. This online database is searchable and offers collections information from the RDFs.



Image A: Photograph taken by author

Of course, these days, the archive is often digitally accessible and is not specifically located. This aligns with Azoulay, who notes that all archives exist beyond their material borders (Azoulay 2019: 164). In *Potential History*, Azoulay explores the idea that an archive extends beyond its material borders and challenges the conventional understanding of archives as static repositories of documents and emphasizes their dynamic and expansive nature. Azoulay argues that an archive is not limited to the physical storage of materials but encompasses a broader network of relationships, power dynamics, and interconnected histories. She contends that the archive exists in the interactions between people, institutions, and the documents themselves. The archive, in her view, is a living entity that is continually shaped and reshaped through

ongoing processes of engagement, interpretation, and dialogue. Azoulay writes of how the archive extends to affect everyone, explaining how imperial governance meant engagement with the archive even if it was unbeknownst to the subject. Further, she explains how the classifications of the archive order social life, meaning that it's an "archival regime operated by the many" (Azoulay 2019: 164). As such, viewing the archive as a physical space deflects from understanding its Lovecraftian nature; the archive is vast and tentacular. The archive was never an objective account in material form, but an act of creation in itself. The archive is not a repository to preserve documents, but rather a mechanism by which documents are created as objects of preservation (Azoulay 2019: 194).

In this sense, the archive is a process, continually shaping and being shaped by social and political dynamics. The process begins with the act of documentation, where decisions are made about what to record and what to omit, who has the authority to document, and under what conditions. Moreover, the maintenance and classification within the archive furthers this process. Documents are not merely stored, but categorized, indexed, and interpreted in ways that reflect and reinforce existing social orders. This ongoing process of organization and reorganization ensures that the archive is dynamic, continuously interacting with the present and shaping the future. This sentiment is reflected by cultural theorist Stuart Hall in his article "Constituting an Archive" in *Third Text*, when he challenges the traditional notion that archives are mere repositories of historical documents and artifacts, instead arguing that archives are active agents in shaping our understanding of history, culture, and identity. He writes that "archives are not inert historical collections. They always stand in an active, dialogic, relation to the questions which the present puts to the past; and the present always puts its questions differently from one generation to another" (2001: 92). The archive operates

through the engagement of countless individuals, from archivists and historians to policymakers and the public, all contributing to the evolving nature of the archival regime. Therefore, the archive is not a static entity but a living process, an ongoing act of creation and re-creation. It is through this lens that we can understand the impact of the archive, as it constructs and reconstructs the frameworks within which we understand our past and envision our future.

Expanding on the concept further, according to Derrida's definition of the archive, it's imperative to recognize that the guardians or custodians of the archive are not external entities but integral components of the archive itself. This notion is echoed in the work of scholars like Ariella Azoulay, who emphasizes that individuals performing various roles within societal structures, such as soldiers, also play a significant role in shaping the archive. Azoulay's observations highlight that colonial officers, through their actions in collecting war trophies or artifacts, effectively engage in a form of field collecting, thus becoming active participants in the archival process. Consequently, it becomes evident that the archive extends beyond physical repositories and encompasses the individuals who contribute to its formation and maintenance. In essence, field collectors, including soldiers and other agents, are not merely observers or collectors but also serve as archivists in their own right, actively shaping the narrative and content of the archive through their actions. This perspective emphasizes the dynamic and relational nature of the archive, in which human agents play a crucial role. The archive is not only a repository of materials but also made of people, a product of human interactions, decisions, and interpretations.

In this vein, many of the discussions of the archive in this work are not about the physical archives at Oxford and beyond, but are about the Imperial Archive. Most definitions of

institutional archives imply a sense of duty to “put away” and “shelter” documents. However, as argued by Azoulay, these terms more aptly describe imperial gestures rather than any sort of definition of how the archive inherently works (Azoulay 2019: 187). Generally, the archive is conceptualized as an institution, but perhaps it is more helpful to consider the archive as a regime, following Azoulay who posits that the archive is “a regime that consists of a set of practices materialized in papers” (2019: 171). Etymologically speaking, Thomas Richards in “The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire” traces the origins of the term for archive back to the Greek *archke*, meaning government (1993). This aligns with Azoulay, with both her and Richards arguing that archives are about control. Thomas Richards describes the imperial archive as an operation field and a utopian space of comprehensive knowledge:

This archive was neither a library nor a museum, though imperial fiction is full of little British libraries and museums scattered all over the globe. Rather the imperial archive was a fantasy of knowledge collected and united in the service of state and Empire. (1993: 6)

Richards explains that “in imperial mythology the archive was less a specific institution than an entire epistemological complex for representing a comprehensive knowledge within the domain of Empire” (Richards 1993: 14). Further, when discussing the imperial colonial archives, historian Vincent Hiribarren has provided a definition of the archive which moved beyond a locatedness, noting that the imperial archive is any official document produced in a colonial territory by the European powers (Hiribarren 2017: 74). This dissertation uses and expands Hiribarren’s definition of imperial archives to include unofficial documents in its conceptualization of the archive. For example, at the PRM past curators would write numbers or notes directly onto materials. These writings surely form a critical part of the archival inscription process and the museum’s archive. This provides a more fruitful analysis of the ways in which materials are related to the inscribed archive: here the archive is imposed upon materials, physically altering them.

Defining the archive and its structures in this way is important, but beyond the physical structures of the archive, conceptually this work must also consider the structures of provenance. Laura Millar suggests separating provenance histories into categories in her work “The Death of the Fonds and the Resurrection of Provenance” from 2002. In this article, Millar argues that the conflation of intellectual and physical realities over time has blurred the essential distinction between creators and records, challenging traditional archival approaches like the fonds. As such, she suggests considering provenance in categories. These three areas of provenance can be categorized as:

- (1) creator history, or “the story of who created, accumulated, and used the records over time,” focused on the creator and not the records;
- (2) records history, or “the story of the physical arrangement and movement of the records over time. This would be an adaptation of artistic provenance”; and
- (3) custodial history, or “the explanation of the transfer of ownership or custody of the records from the creator or custodian to the archival institution and the subsequent care of those records. (Jones 2019: 886)

In alignment with Millar’s 2002 conceptual framing, these chapters try to parse out the different provenances. However, in this work I instead consider occlusions in the histories of taking, keeping, and returning of the museological collections. This work will therefore use these categories of provenance to consider what types of provenance history are available to use for research purposes. I consider Millar’s three categories in this work instead as five repurposed and expanded categories:

- 1) creator history, the story of who created and used the subject
- 2) a taking history, the story of how it was taken from its setting
- 3) a keeping history, the story of how it was kept (includes record history)
- 4) a return history, the less common story of a return
- 5) a living history, the story of what happens after a return

It is important to note that provenance research has a history which is situated in Holocaust studies and memory studies. This connection illustrates the intention of provenance research to be used to combat loss and to initiate returns. However, as discussed later in Chapter Five, the information produced by this type of research can be used to both support and undermine repatriation claims. Therefore, how this information is unearthed and mobilized is critical. With this in mind, it is important to note that this specific research is therefore not a practice of mining for treasures in the archive. This work could easily view the archive as a site in which new facts might emerge, but this is not a practice of uncovering new information in the categories of the histories detailed above. For instance, archival mining might see the hidden lives of field collectors in Chapter Four as a revelation which adds to our understanding. However, this work instead departs from the prevalent research use of the archive as an extractive site, and learns from Azoulay, who cautions students of the archive to practice “stepping back from the inclination to unearth secrets from the archive of catastrophes ... disengaging from the position of the explorer-historian” (Azoulay 2019: 188). Following in this path, the obscured colonial lives of field collectors are not the main contribution of this work; this research is not a provenance research project which seeks to discover “new” truths in the archive, nor is it ethnography *in* the archive. Perhaps an ethnography of the archive is more accurate.

These archives, like an archaeological site, are often hostile to navigate. Colonial archives especially are often what Denise Burgher calls “hostile archives.” In “Recovering Black Women in the Colored Conventions Movement” (2019) by Denise Burgher, the concept of “hostile archives” is introduced to analyze the challenges researchers faced when researching the Colored Conventions Movement. Burgher discusses how historical records often reflect biases and omissions, particularly regarding the experiences and contributions of Black women within the movement. In a similar way, in *Fiction In The Archives: Pardon Tales And Their Tellers In Sixteenth-Century France* (1987), Natalie Zemon Davis argues that historical documents, particularly those produced by institutions of power such as legal records, ecclesiastical records, and official narratives, often reflect the perspectives and biases of the ruling elite. These documents may contain negative portrayals or stereotypes of marginalized groups, such as women, minorities, and the poor, reinforcing dominant social hierarchies and justifying systems of oppression. Davis coined the term “hostile documents” to describe sources that were created by individuals or institutions with vested interests in maintaining the status quo and controlling dissent. She examines how accusations of witchcraft, for example, were often based on hostile interpretations of women’s behavior and sexuality, reflecting broader anxieties about female agency and social disorder. Davis used these pardon tales to weigh fact and fiction in the archive and notes that for her work the archive was hostile and contained lies and misrepresentations. Extending Davis’ ideas and using Burgher’s conceptualization of a hostile archive, it is clear that the archive itself is hostile in this sense. More practically, the archive holds details of violent acts, human bodies which have had violence enacted upon them, and materials that are used to continually enact violence in the present. This hostile archive is a challenge for all researchers using the archive, but especially for

researchers who have violence enacted against them by the archive. For a researcher who is constructing a claim for return, the documents in the archive tell of horrific acts against their communities. Moreover, as the central theme of this work is human remains, it is important to remember that archives can contain bodies which have been violently displaced and damaged by the processes of the museum, archive, and empire. There is real violence in the archive.

The hostile archive, the archival process, and the mechanisms of the colonial archive are obstacles for all who attempt to mobilize information from archives. However, it is important to note that these occlusions are not the malicious coordination of the institution, but instead are part of the larger structures at play within anthropological material culture work. The practices of collecting and the manner in which things are labeled and what is chosen to be recorded are known to be potentially violent practices (Ashby and Machin 2021). The occlusions that occur as a result of these functions damage the efforts of both source communities and the institutions who are seeking to make returns. It is clear that these occlusions cause problems for researchers and institutions like the PRM, who struggle to decipher these deliberately incomplete archives and dedicate much time, effort, money, and care into attempting to patch these big black holes in the information we have available about the material culture that it cares for. In Hodgkinson's 2024 institutional history of the National Trust and its historical links to colonialism, she notes that separating institutional action from individual action is critical. With this in mind, following the work of Hodgkinson, this work explicitly refers to the PRM as "it" rather than "they." In this way, we can emphasize that this is systemic and structural, rather than the work of non-compliance at a single institution. Nevertheless, for this research, these occlusions must still be treated as a deliberate function of the disciplinary and museological structures.

Ultimately, various definitions of the archive fall short because the archive is not a static entity; it is, in fact, a dynamic process (Richards 1993, Stoler 2009, Azoulay 2019). In many ways, archival theory “is a theory that privileges wholeness” (Lowry 2017: 1) and while this idea of wholeness can be helpful (Morton 2009), it also shrouds the archive in the fantasy of completeness. Instead, the archival process involves the selection made by curators—decisions about which emails to print, which research articles to include in online databases, and which travel diaries to reference. In line with Trouillot, Stoler, and Azoulay’s perspectives, it becomes evident that archives operate through a process of curation, selection, and cutting. Despite this, there is a persistent tendency to speak of the archive as if it were a cohesive and complete entity, akin to a whole body. Expanding on this notion, it may be more accurate to conceive of the archive as amputated. With this premise in mind, this study investigates the act of severing within the archive to elucidate how its gaps function as a form of dispossession, exploring the implications this has for the concept of restitution. This section has attempted to define the archive for the purposes of this work and explored the fragmentation of museological archives. Next, I consider the similarly fragmented status of human remains within museums and their positionings.

3.3 Corpus Delicti

The previous section considered the nature of the archive, and the following section considers the institutional archival process for human remains and their connections to the archive, arguing that human remains in museums have a unique status in the archive, functioning as an archive of race sciences. In museums, human remains are subsumed into the archive in multiple ways. For example, archival museum documentation processes often involve photographing their collections. In this case, by

capturing subjects in photographs the archive is able to “produce them a second time as archived objects in museums’ collections” (Azoulay 2019: 177). In this sense, human remains occupy a unique space for heritage institutions. To consider this unique standing we might look at photographs. Archival photographs, like human remains, have an “uncertain status being at the same time very often both exhibition objects (held by museums) and documentary sources (held by archives)” (Janak 2020: 66). This dual status is also reflected in the ways that the archive is “simultaneously both a primary and secondary source” (Baird and McFayden 2014: 29). In this sense, human remains are both the evidence as well as the object of display. This section outlines the conceptual approach towards human remains in collections, asking what are human remains in museums?

Human remains are not always so clearly defined. In museum contexts, distinctions are made among various categories of human remains, reflecting differences in their treatment. The label of human remains encompass the physical remnants of deceased individuals, ranging from intact skeletons to cremated ashes. Modified human remains usually refers to bodies or body parts intentionally altered, such as skulls subjected to cranial deformation or bones adorned with engravings. There are also composite artifacts incorporating human remains, such as the wicker head in Chapter Two which uses human teeth and hair. These differentiations can be helpful, but also problematic. In his chapter “Human Remains, the Disciplines of the Dead, and the South African Memorial Complex” featured in *The Politics of Heritage in Africa*, Ciraj Rassool explores the complex dynamics surrounding the handling of human remains within museum contexts, particularly within the South African context. Rassool highlights the ethical, cultural, and political implications of treating human remains as artifacts and critiques the ways in which colonial and apartheid-era practices have dehumanized African bodies,

turning them into objects of study and display. Basically, these different categories of human remains can be used to classify some human remains as artefacts.

In this sense, human remains are sometimes positioned not as human but as artefact, truth, text, archive, or as parts. For example, human remains are often defined not necessarily as human, but as artefactual human remains. The distinction here between human remains and artefactual human remains in museums is unhelpful in that it separates anthropology and cultural anthropology. With these distinctions, bioanthropology might be deemed as controversial because those collections consist of human remains, whereas cultural anthropological collections are allowed because they are no longer human remains, but instead artefactual, modified, and no longer human remains. By doing so, the ethical and restitution-related implications associated with these remains risk being oversimplified and relegated to bioanthropological debate, rather than being addressed as broader concerns within the entire field of anthropology. This distinction raises critical questions about whether it is designed to absolve cultural anthropologists from responsibility, framing the complex issues of restitution and the presence of human remains in museums as concerns solely for bioanthropology. In this way, cultural modifications are used to separate these types of human remains and absolve cultural anthropology from the scrutiny that bioanthropology faces.

Further, human remains are sometimes considered as truth, in many disciplines there is a claim that truth is “written” on bodies. In her studies of mass graves, Layla Renshaw writes of how forensic exhumation is the most crucial aspect of identifying atrocity; bodies are the infallible proof of trauma (2011). *Corpus delicti* is “the body of the crime” and the notion of the tangible aspects of a crime committed, such as a corpse. In this vein, a human body can appear more enduring than witness testimony (Renshaw 2011:

15). Clyde Snow, a forensic anthropologist known for his work in identifying human remains in the aftermath of conflict and political violence, often emphasizes the steadfast reliability of bones, stating that they always tell the truth (Joyce and Stover 1997). Forensic scientists insist that bones never lie (Klinenberg 2002). Does this claim apply to anthropological material culture? When Eric Klinenberg considered the evidentiary status of the body and what kind of information the body can convey or conceal, he concluded that bodies do not carry self-evident truths (2002). In fact, his study of the human remains from the 1995 Chicago heat wave show that the dead bodies actually obfuscated the structural political violence which caused these deaths. It seems that bodies are not always truth.

Given that bodies do not represent absolute truths, some scholars instead consider the body displayed in a museum as a form of text. For example, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, a Professor of Medical Anthropology Emerita at the University of California, discusses how the body is often considered as text in the modern academe (2001). Yet for human remains in museums, lies are often literally written onto bodies. Given that in museums words are written onto bodies, often an accession number or the name of a field collector/donor, the lie of objecthood is written onto the body, the dehumanization is physically written onto it. In this sense, human remains as text can be fictitious. Therefore, the argument that the body is a record of truth or a text is not helpful for understanding the dispossession inherent in museum practices.

Clearly, human remains in museums are bones, flesh, and bodies. However, Hortense Spillers' theorization of Black bodies illustrates the divide between "the body" and "flesh" (1987). The idea is that the body has an agency which mere flesh lacks. Flesh has no agentive power and is "subject to consumption and interpretation by others" (Watkins

2018: 32). By cutting up bodies, museums make bodies into parts of flesh.

Scheper-Hughes also notes that the body can also be sold or stolen into divisible and alienable parts (2001), wherein the body is commodified in “the ethics of parts” and bones (Cohen 1999). There is a ripping away of personhood from flesh and bone. In this sense, human remains are not often positioned as people. Still, human remains in museums do not sit easily in any of these conceptualizations. It seems that bodies in museums are neither inherent truth, nor archive, nor text, and perhaps not even human. Historically, human remains were not seen as text or truth, or even human, but instead as objects of study and display. As discussed previously, bodies occupied unique positions as both archival evidence and material of display in this sense. At Oxford, human remains were first systematically collected, organized, and displayed at the university for purportedly scientific purposes. More specifically, these human remains were collected in order to tell a story. It seems that maybe human remains in museums might be best seen as fiction.

To historically situate this fiction, it is important to note that the biggest stimulus for the systematic study of skulls was to facilitate white supremacy and colonialism. The collections of skulls, such as the Morton Collection, were critical to the creation of racial sciences. The Morton Cranial Collection was a collection of human skulls assembled by Samuel George Morton, an American physician and scientist. It was composed of over 1,000 human skulls from diverse populations worldwide which Morton used to measure cranial capacity, aiming to correlate skull size with intelligence and racial characteristics. His findings supported the pseudoscientific notion of racial hierarchies, contributing to scientific racism by suggesting inherent racial differences in intelligence. Morton’s work was influential in his time, reinforcing racist ideologies and justifying slavery and

segregation in the United States. Ultimately, in order for these racial sciences to exist, they required evidence and collections of skulls.

In short, racial science spurred a collective need for institutions to gather evidence. As discussed in Chapter Two, before Darwin's *On the Origins of Species*, the polygenist model was widely accepted and argued that humans came from different places and were discrete. Thus, these differences had to be quantified. Malgosia Nowak-Kemp of the OUMNH describes the British context for this same type of collecting in "Ancient Greek skulls in the Oxford University Museum" and argues that skulls were collected to answer questions such as "What are the differences between whites and their black slaves? Was slavery a natural phenomenon?" and most importantly: "What race achieved the highest attainment on the evolutionary stepladder?" (2012: 90). To answer these questions, institutions like the University of Oxford assembled massive collections of human remains. It was important that these collections were diverse, with skulls from Greece, Russia, Asia and the Americas. With such a diverse collection, comparative analysis could confirm why white people were superior to their black slaves. More bluntly, a "universal scramble" for skulls occurred in order to find evidence which would confirm an extant story of racial superiority (Nowak-Kemp 2012: 90). The story already existed in the ways that humans functioned, but scientific evidence to justify those stories was needed. Thus, scientific institutions sought to assemble skulls by which they might be able to prove that this story was correct and evidence was sought in order to support an extant story. In this sense, human remains in museums were thus not text nor truth, but indeed a fiction.

Of course, after Darwin's monogenist model gained popularity, most scientists accepted that humans were not too biologically distinct. In fact, humans have fewer biological

differences between them than most other animals; multiple people taken from random samplings across the globe will have more biological similarities than an equally comparable sample of monkeys from the same geographic area (Boyd 2009). Following Darwin's mongenist model, the false polygenist story no longer holds much credence in modern academia. As discussed in Chapter Two, in 1981 Stephen Jay Gould demonstrated the fallacy of racial sciences in *The Mismeasure of Man* and disproved the story of biological racism which these skulls were assembled to prove. According to Gould's debunking of phrenological sciences, people are genetically the same and therefore "previous claims for a direct biological mapping of human affairs have recorded prejudice and not nature" (Gould 1981 [1996]: 354). In turn, most large collections of skulls at Oxford were distributed to other collections and no longer so centralized; however, the existence of human remains in collections still has meaning and references the refuted story of biological racism. However, the collections of skulls still exist. Despite current knowledge that these phrenological and racist sciences are indeed false, collections of human remains in museums are still present and still tell the story of race science. As such, this research aims to understand that story.

This dissertation makes three passes at understanding returns. More broadly, three cases of returns pales in comparison to the multitude of potential restitutions that have been requested or could be facilitated. However, this work is using these three case studies in order to touch on the broader themes that relate to many returns. In this dissertation, Chapter Two has outlined the context for this research and this methods chapter has outlined the approach to this research. To explore how dispossession is inscribed in these structures, I have explained how this work uses an approach informed by the work of Stoler, Fuentes, and Tuck and Yang by seeking to identify dispossession through identifying the following in the inscribed histories constructed around these case

studies through i) occlusions and omissions, ii) duress and iii) moves to innocence. The following dissertation looks to identify these features within anthropological theory itself, the museum, and the archive.

In order to confront the story of dispossession in museums, the main contribution of the first case study is the typology of redactions, which builds the groundwork for the next case studies. This first case study functions to build an understanding of how a lack of information is an obstacle for returns; critically it proves that the lack of information is a function of the structures itself. From this grounding, the second case study goes on to ask if that lack of information is a viable justification for refusing returns. Finally, the last case study takes that informational void at face value, considering how anthropology's structures of theory and language could approach the lack of information from a new perspective.

Chapter 4: The First Return

While the previous chapters situated this work within the literature context and outlined the methodological approach of this research, this chapter uses that foundation to consider the first case study of the return of six human remains to Australia from the PRM in 1990. This chapter will identify occlusions related to these human remains during acquisition, museological keeping, and the return process, before considering duress and moves to innocence in the legacy of this return. The six human remains are identified as follows:

- 1887.33.26: female skull with ochre from Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH)
- 1898.75.112: skull from Emile Clement
- 1900.55.308: skull from Stockdale, Hardy, and Wilkins
- 1900.55.309: painted skull from Stockdale, Hardy, and Wilkins
- 1900.55.310: skull of a man from Stockdale, Hardy, and Wilkins
- 1901.58.1: human penis from Emile Clement

Using the case study of this return, this chapter ultimately contributes a typology of redactions in order to add to our understanding of what types of gaps in the archive are most prevalent, and demonstrates how returns are challenged by the dispossession of knowledge. This typology not only identifies different forms of omissions and gaps within the archival material but also sheds light on their underlying causes and implications. Moreover, the chapter elucidates how returns are inherently challenged by these gaps in the archive by highlighting the obstacles faced by individuals or communities seeking to reclaim their history or assert their rights in the face of institutionalized erasure or

neglect. By grappling with these themes, this chapter not only enriches scholarly discourse on archival studies but also underscores the broader implications for historical understanding, social justice, and politics of memory. It emphasizes the imperative of acknowledging and addressing the limitations and biases inherent within archival collections, while also advocating for increased transparency in archival practices and for museums to acknowledge how institutions recenter power. In this sense, this chapter contributes to an understanding of how anthropological theory, by encouraging the use of informants, positions the museum as an expert authority.

This chapter uses the current anthropological voice, in the sense that it focuses on names and dates and dutifully explores the data available. In this chapter, the anthropological voice maintains a deliberate, confident, and precise tone. It is academic, speaking as a practitioner within a textual anthropological tradition. This chapter uses this anthropological voice as an experiment, in order to test how this voice functions when it is forced to confront archival gaps and dispossession of knowledge. Historian and anthropologist Nicholas Dirks wrote that, unfortunately, his “interest in the small voices and contradictory ruptures of history was not designed for easy access” (Dirks 2002). In this sense, the use of this voice is a trial which tests how current structures function when examining dispossession.

4.1 Clement

- 1898.75.112: skull from Emile Clement
- 1901.58.1: human penis from Emile Clement

While identifying occlusions in this case study, I began to form a typology of redactions by identifying two main categorizations of occlusions. The first type of occlusion regards erasing details of humanity from colonized people. The second type of occlusion disguises the sheer scale of violence, wherein the disturbingly violent details of acquisition are hidden. This next section identifies those minimizations in this first case study, considering the occlusions that occurred during field collection by acquisition and taking.

First, the PRM had acquired two subjects from Emile Louis Bruno Clement (1844–1928) in 1898 and 1901. The first was a skull and the second was a human penis in formaldehyde. The human penis from 1901 is now known as object number 1901.58.1. It was acquired by Clement in Australia in 1900, when a young Gnamo man had been hunting in Australia, by “the Oakover, a tributary to the De Grey River in the Nullagine district” (PRM file R/D/F/ Accession No. 1901.58.1). The man died from pneumonia and, after his death, his Taketa/doctor was bribed by a German man named Emile Clement, to remove the Gnamo man’s penis and give it to Clement in exchange for money. On May 30, 1901, Clement sent a letter to Henry Balfour at the Pitt Rivers Museum, visible in Image B below, in which he brags about how lucky the PRM is that he has secured this specimen (Clement 1901). The man’s severed penis was purchased by the museum that year.

1901. 58.1-22.
Rhosmaen.
Llandilo, R.S.O.
Clyde House
Carshalton
Surrey.
May 30th 1901
Dear Mrs Balfour.
Many thanks for your
cheque for £5.0.0. received
this morning.
I managed to obtain the
Nicholas Specimen on the
Oakhover, a tributary to
the De Grey River in the
Caullogine District. (see
my map, sent last year.)
I camped at a waterhole
there to give my horses
a much needed rest, when
a young man, about
26 years old, belonging
to the Gwamo tribe, died

Image B: Clement, 1901. Letter from Clement to Balfour from May 30th 1901 in PRM file R/D/F/ Accession No. 1901.58.1, photograph taken by author.

Regarding the first type of occlusion that my typology of redactions has identified, the acquisition itself strips the human remains of all humanity and context. Primarily, these human remains are identifiable only by accession number, rather than name. In Kim Wagner's 2017 book *The Skull of Alum Bheg*, he says that the human remains that are displayed at the PRM specifically, "neither the name of the individual, nor the exact circumstances under which they died, are considered significant" (Wagner 2017: 2). It is common, then, to not have this humanizing information. Reductions in the form of unrecorded information are plenty here, as this information provided about this man does not contain a name, height, gravesite, family members, eye color, or favorite food. Why

did Clement not record any information about this man? Given that he was able to determine the man's age and cause of death, it is likely he would have also been able to record the man's name. In the 1901 letter that Clement wrote to Blafour at the PRM about his acquisition, he includes includes the age of a person and their cause of death, which was pneumonia (Clement 1901). This type of information is typically left unrecorded in most museological archives. However, despite this limited information, it remains difficult to humanize the Gnamo man. The undocumented information deliberately makes it hard to perceive the severed penis as part of a real human being. As such, this young man has become a museological object which is dehumanized and objectified by having the details of his humanity occluded from records. This type of gap in the archive therefore reduces the ability to humanize the remains in the museum.

Clement collected these human remains because he believed they were a valuable example of the micka operation, which is a type of circumcision which Clement describes as being done "to prevent the rapid increase of children" and "consists of the splitting of the Urethra for about 5 centimeters with a sharp flintstone" (Clement 1904: 13). However, his collection of genital organs specifically reflects a wider history of exoticism, dehumanization of colonized bodies. A century before Clement traveled to Australia, the collection and display of genital organs was already a part of the historical objectification and exploitation of non-European bodies. A famous example of this is Sarah Baartman, who was known as the Hottentot Venus. Sarah Baartman was a Khoikhoi woman from South Africa whose body was exhibited in both her life and her death due to her physical features, which were exoticized and sexualized by Western audiences. While she was alive from 1789 – 1815, she was displayed and exhibited in London and France. After her death in 1815 her body was displayed in museums such as Musée d'Histoire Naturelle. Sarah's body was on display in Paris when Clement collected the severed

Australian penis in 1901. Later, her remains were displayed at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, where Mauss worked, from 1937 until 1974.

By focusing on Baartman's physical features, Europeans dehumanized her, reducing her to an object of curiosity and scientific inquiry. This treatment reflected and perpetuated the notion of non-European people as "other," less human, and more primitive.

Baartman's body was hypersexualized, reinforcing stereotypes about African women as being inherently more sexual and closer to nature, playing into broader narratives that justified colonialism by portraying non-European societies as uncivilized and in need of European control and "civilization." The pseudo-scientific study of Baartman's body was part of a broader trend of scientific racism, where physical differences were used to construct hierarchies of race by classifying and categorizing human beings to justify the racial superiority of Europeans. The act of collecting and displaying the body parts of colonized individuals was an exercise of power. It symbolized the ultimate control over the physical body, even in death. After almost 200 years of display, her remains were finally returned to South Africa and buried in 2002.

Clement's collection of this man's severed penis in 1901 in order to be displayed in a British museum is evidence of this phenomenon, reflecting attitudes of colonial superiority and the commodification of colonized bodies. This was a common practice. In the context of African cultural practices, genitalia, particularly those subjected to ritual circumcision, were collected and studied by European anthropologists and medical professionals. Such practices dehumanized the individuals involved, reducing them to mere specimens for European curiosity and scientific exploitation. This not only stripped the collected individuals of their humanity but also perpetuated a narrative that justified colonial dominance and racial hierarchies. The historical context of Clement's actions

underscores a broader pattern of objectifying and subjugating non-European people, embedding these prejudiced perspectives deeply into scientific and cultural institutions. The display of these body parts in museums further entrenched these views in public consciousness, shaping perceptions of race and reinforcing the power dynamics of colonialism. Thus, Clement's collection is emblematic of a larger history of exploitation, where the bodies of the colonized were appropriated and displayed to affirm the supposed superiority and civilizing mission of the colonizers.

The second type of occlusion hides the scale and violence of imperial domination. For the severed penis in this case study (1901.58.1), this redaction is primarily a product of Clement's own actions rather than deliberate obfuscation from the museum, as he hides information linking him to colonial violence from the museums he is selling to. This redaction is visible primarily in the field collector biography held in the PRM archives.

The PRM lists the following information about Clement in their Related Document Files:

"Clement, E.; Biography: PRM relationship: Field Collector...PRM Source
Continents: Australia Career: Traveller, Amateur Anthropologist Clubs: Royal
Anthropological Institute;" (PRM RDF 1901.58.1)

Clement's career is shown here as "traveler" and "amateur anthropologist" who is aligned with the Royal Anthropological Institute. Indeed, Clement positioned himself as an amateur anthropologist in his letters to the PRM; however, this was not accurate. To expand upon this biography, Emile Clement was a German man who moved to England in 1870, where he taught natural philosophy and chemistry at Bramham College in Yorkshire (McCalman 2001). Clement was trained as a scientist and spent his time in England publishing two geology and chemistry textbooks and completing a doctoral degree. Most interestingly, Bramham College had been part of the estate of Lane Fox Pitt Rivers. Before he became Pitt Rivers, Lane Fox had lived at Bramham Biggin from

1829 until 1832 before his move to London. A decade later, by 1843, the home had been leased to Bramham College. Bramham College was housed in a house called Bramham Biggin and possessed 130 acres of parks and gardens which had been leased by the headmaster. Clement would have taught at Bramham College in the shadow of Lane Fox.

After living in Yorkshire, Clement returned to Germany in 1882, he spent several years in Germany excavating and acquiring Bronze Age material which he “sold to numerous British museums including the British Museum (1877), the Royal Museum of Scotland (1877), the Cardiff Museum, the Dublin Museum (1883), the Reading Museum (1885), and the Ashmolean Museum (1886)” (British Museum, “Dr. Emile Clement”). Afterward, Clement entered a new business and used his geology knowledge in the field of mining, where he began to work for a gold mining company in the goldfields of Australia. In 1895 Clement traveled from Germany to Australia to be closer to the gold mining businesses, one in Trowunna and one near Roebourne in the Pilbara (Paterson and Witcomb 2021: 210).

Clearly, Clement’s occupation was actually in gold mining. However, Clement knew that his image would affect his interactions with museums. As such, in his extensive correspondence to museums, Clement never mentions his gold mining business (McCalman 2001: 169; Paterson and Witcomb 2021: 212). Even in his photographs of Towranna, Clement carefully excludes European presence and indications of the gold mines, despite the fact that they are a “dominant feature of the Towranna landscape” (McCalman 2001: 170). Instead, he emphasizes his identity as an anthropologist and explorer. Clement hid his work as a gold miner whose career was in the extraction of natural resources in order to facilitate his extraction of cultural resources and human

bodies behind the benign facade of anthropology. Of Clement's practices specifically, Paterson and Witcomb say that "Clement extracted material from the northwest of Western Australia for private financial gain by framing it within an ethnographic discourse" (Paterson and Witcomb 2021: 216). According to Paterson and Witcomb, Clement knew to hide his gold mining connections:

The archival record reveals that Clement was primarily driven by personal financial gain, and perhaps a desire for recognition as an informed collector. He never refers to the fact that he was in the North West for gold prospecting; presumably, this fact was not consistent with his self-portrayal as a knowledgeable collector. (Paterson and Witcomb 2021: 212)

Clement occludes his connections to the violence of Australian colonization when he positions himself as an anthropologist, relying upon the guise of anthropology to distance himself from colonial violence. Clement played into the romanticized idea of the anthropologist explorer in Australia and deliberately presented this image to museums. In this sense, anthropology became a morally acceptable cover under which Clement could profit from his cultural extraction. Before arriving in Western Australia, Clement had already been aware of how lucrative collecting for museums could be. Clement's acquaintance, the British anthropologist James Edge Partington, spoke of how he sought out body parts while traveling in Australia, saying that he had gone to Australia "with a vivid memory of the London museums, and soon began to collect aboriginal weapons, utensils, etc. He spent his spare time in some caves along the south coast of New South Wales, digging among the old graves of the aborigines." (Edge-Partington 1915: 10). Thus, while Clement was in Australia, he began harvesting what he called "sets." Clement amassed his own ethnographic sets, "with each listed object localised to a 'tribe' and described by a language term" (Jones 2018: 147). His systematic approach to collection culminated with Clement profiting from selling over 1600 Aboriginal artefacts from Western Australia to museums over the course of 32 years (Jones 2018: 147). In

total, Emile Louis Bruno Clement is listed as the PRM source or field collector for 202 materials in the PRM collections online database. In October 1898 the PRM had purchased the other skull (1898.75.112) in this case study from Clement. Clement sold the “micka specimen” to the Pitt Rivers Museum in May 1901 and there is no record of the price paid.

Clement's approach to collecting was not unique and was part of a larger systematic extraction of human remains from Australia as there was a huge trade in human remains during the time Clement was in Australia. Cressida Fforde has traced this trade of aboriginal human remains in Australia during the 1800s and describes an entire marketplace, which was so widespread and destructive that laws against it had to be affected by 1913. This large internal Australian market existed, as detailed by Fforde (2020), but there is also a more global market of commerce in selling human remains to English museums. She tracks some fossicker sales that are internal to Australian museums, but also notes that one fossicker reached out to the British Museum in 1914 (Fforde 2020: 371). These fossicker sales were enabled by the colonial environment at this time in Australia.

In a similar way, Clement's mining business and his collecting business worked alongside each other: Clement camped in the Pilbara area for mining purposes and was simultaneously able to bribe a local doctor into dismembering a corpse. His ability to amass such a large collection of human remains was dependent on the simultaneous physical extraction of the land, since his ethnographic practices were only possible because of his mining business. This larger systemic dispossession of natural resources is connected to the extraction of cultural resources. Clement deliberately occluded this fact in an attempt to better entice the anthropology museum who, in turn, amplified the

image of an anthropological explorer, rather than a colonial businessman. Despite his attempts to hide this connection, Clement's anthropological collecting was only possible because of his gold mining business.

Clement's desire to position himself as an anthropologist and occlude his gold mining career is clear in his published work from 1904. Nine years after first traveling to Australia, Clement published "Ethnographical Notes on the Western-Australian Aborigines." In these travel journals, Clement explicitly mentions the human remains that this research focuses on. In his notes Clement specifies that his collection is at the Oxford museum. He emphasizes the connection with the Oxford museum and solidifies his role as an anthropologist. In his notes, he says he "was lucky enough to secure a very perfect specimen on which the operation can be seen. It is now in the University Museum, Oxford" (1904: 13).

This excerpt from Clement's journals clearly shows both of the types of occlusions identified in my typology of redactions. The first type of occlusion dehumanizes the remains when Clement remakes this human man into a "specimen" by calling it that. The second type of occlusion, which hides violence, is evident in this excerpt about his collection of the penis when Clement declines to mention that he obtained it by bribery.

However, Clement is willing to admit to the bribery in different and more private settings than he did in May 1901, when the Pitt Rivers Museum received a letter from Clement revealing the bribe. Clement is willing to share with the PRM in 1901 that he obtained the human penis through bribery, but is not willing to share this information in his published work from 1904. In his own words:

I managed to obtain the Micka specimen on the Oakover, a tributary to the De Grey River in the Nullagine district...I encamped at a waterhole there to give my horses a rest, when a young man, about 26 years old, belonging to the Gnamo tribe, died of Pneumonia in a native Hunting Camp about 2 mile from mine. By bribing the native "Taketa" or Doctor, I was enabled to secure the specimen. (PRM file R/D/F/ Accession No. 1901.58.1)

Clement hides the bribery in his 1904 published work despite bragging about it in his 1901 letter to the PRM. As demonstrated in this chapter, Clement was personally responsible for redacting his connections to the extractive violence of colonial domination in Australia from his correspondence with museums. The occluded biographical information connects these collectors to the entire colonial system, and in this sense the biographies of the collectors connect the museological human remains to the brutality of the system. Therefore, by occluding these histories, the skulls can be distanced from the violence of colonialism.

Though some museums are able to provide biographical information of their collectors such as in the PRM's relational museum project, many others cannot. It is a function of the anthropological and museological structures that this information would not be represented by a museum. There is often not enough funding or time to make this information available to the public without specialized projects to research collector histories. In "Missing Evidence: Why Museums Should Learn from the Past," from 2005, Jane Morris advocates for museums to consider these types of gaps in their collections, particularly concerning underrepresented communities and perspectives. Morris argues that museums have historically overlooked or ignored certain narratives and voices, resulting in incomplete and biased representations of history and culture. She suggests that museums should actively seek out missing evidence and incorporate diverse perspectives into their collections and exhibitions. Again, this type of research suggested by Morris would require funding and labor which museums generally do not have access

to. However, rather than seeking to see the hidden lives of field collectors like Clement and Stockdale as revelations which add to our understanding, this research instead considers the outcome of these information gaps.

Despite the fact that the majority of the information in the archive pertaining to the skull (1898.75.112) and the penis (1901.58.1) is about the field collector Clement, his true biographical details are still excluded from the archive. The true details of why Clement was in Australia are hidden in the museum archive's biography of Clement and that the larger museological structures hide that he is a direct player within the larger violent colonial system. This direct participation in the violent colonial exploitation and extraction of Australia is hidden, firstly by Clement himself, and then in the archive.

4.2 Stockdale

- 1900.55.308: skull from Stockdale, Hardy, and Wilkins
- 1900.55.309: painted skull from Stockdale, Hardy, and Wilkins
- 1900.55.310: skull of a man from Stockdale, Hardy, and Wilkins

Clement is the source of just two of these six human remains; Stockdale, Hardy, and Wilkins are responsible for another three of the six acquisitions. This next section considers the occlusions related to the field collection of the three of these skulls which are listed as connected to Harry Stockdale, Norman H. Hardy, and Robert Francis Wilkins. As with the first two human remains collected by Clement, there is no humanizing information available. All three of the skulls are described in internal PRM documents as human skulls “showing knocking out of upper central incisor teeth at the initiation of youths into manhood” (Report of the Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum 1900: 2), but there is not much more information. One skull is described as having been

painted and another is described as the skull of an old man. But again, there is no information about their name, date of birth, gravesite, height, siblings or even where they lived. This missing information represents the first type of redaction that this dissertation has identified, wherein there is no information available about these subjects which could humanize them.

In the second type of occlusion, information is missing which can connect these human remains to the colonial violence responsible for the human remains collection. This occlusion can be identified in the biography of their field collector, Harry Stockdale. Ralph Henry Vane Faucett (Harry) Stockdale originally collected the skulls in Australia, they then remained for a period in the possession of Norman H. Hardy, before being donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum by Robert F. Wilkins in 1900. In the case of these three skulls, the original field collector, Harry Stockdale, spent time in Australia from as early as 1884. In a manner similar to Clement, Stockdale's intimate entanglements with the direct colonial violence occurring in Australia are not available in the museum archive. This section therefore will consider what information is available about how these skulls were taken by Stockdale in Australia, with a particular focus on how Stockdale's involvement with colonial violence is occluded.

A non-public database on the makers, collectors, donors represented in the collections at the PRM exists and contains the PRM version of Stockdale's biography. This biography was once shared in an email from the PRM head of collections, Jeremy Coote, to a provenance researcher. In this email to researcher Helen Mears, Coote writes that, regarding Stockdale, "we know relatively little" and shared the biography transcribed below and available in the appendix of this dissertation (Coote 2008: 1). However, the biography that was shared is very different from the biography that my

research uncovered. For example, the non-public PRM version of Stockdale's biography says:

Stockdale lived in Croft, Yorkshire, until his twenties when he emigrated to Lake Hawden,³ South Australia, to join his uncle on a cattle-station. He quickly became an accomplished horseman and artist. Through these interests he met the Australian poet, Adam Lindsay Gordon, who became his first model. Later he drew other subjects including animals. Stockdale's passion for exploring led him inland, where he made extensive sketches of Aboriginal people, objects and weapons and kept a detailed diary of his journeys as well as writing a manuscript about Aboriginal people. During his frequent explorations, he acquired a large collection of Aboriginal artefacts. His most thoroughly documented field trips were made to the northern region of Western Australia, the Kimberleys, in 1884–5 and 1885–6. His illustrated notebooks from these trips give meticulously detailed accounts of the flora and fauna, the weather and descriptions of Aboriginal people. In 1891, Hardy and Stockdale went on an expedition together to the Port Essington and Alligator River regions in the Northern Territory. This was the only time that they traveled together. Among the objects in the Hardy collection in the Pitt Rivers Museum (donated by Robert Francis Wilkins), the majority of the Australian pieces were collected by Stockdale and then obtained by Hardy. (Coote 2008: 1; Appendix A)

Much in this biography is factually correct. Stockdale was born in Darlington, Yorkshire before moving in 1860 to live with his uncle Edward Stockdale at Lake Hawdon Station. However, this biography glosses over the facts of Stockdale's actual involvement in the colonial occupation of Australia. For example, this biography says that "Stockdale's passion for exploring led him inland" and presents Stockdale as an explorer with a love for the land (Coote 2008: 1). However, Stockdale's travels in Australia were actually because he was employed by squatting companies and worked as a lease inspector (Lewis 2004: 147).

As mentioned, Stockdale was born in Darlington, Yorkshire in 1841 before moving in 1860 to live with his uncle Edward Stockdale at Lake Hawdon Station. But rather than

³ There seems to be multiple spellings of Stockdale's home in Australia. Some sources refer to this area as Lake Hawdon instead of Hawden, including a 1984 Australian heritage survey (Heritage Survey of the South East 1984: 83). However, Stockdale himself in an obituary spells it as Hawden, while the area is now referred to as Hawdon. Mistakes in spelling can be easily transposed and repeatedly re-copied. As such, this inaccurate spelling is likely a benign mislabeling and therefore yet another occlusion.

being led to inland Australia by his passion for exploring, in 1884 Stockdale was led inland because he “had been hired by the Victorian Squatting Company, the Cambridge Downs Pastoral Association, Lawrence and Adams, and Boyd and King, to report on land which each group held in the Kimberley” (Lewis 2004: 147). Squatting companies occupied land during this period in Australia, which was basically a process wherein Europeans were stealing land from local communities and occupying it (Cain 1961). During the early colonial period, the Australian government granted vast tracts of land to individuals or companies through land grants or leases. However, especially in the interior regions, much of that land was still unoccupied by colonial actors. Squatting companies arose as a response to the availability of this “unoccupied” land. Squatters would move onto Crown land with their livestock, establishing stations for grazing purposes. They would usually build rudimentary shelters and fences to mark their territory, but they did not legally own the land they occupied. The practice of squatting was technically illegal, as it involved the unauthorized use of Crown land. However, it was tolerated and even tacitly supported by colonial authorities, who saw it as a way to encourage the development of the interior regions and the expansion of the pastoral industry. In Stockdale’s case, these squatting companies sent out groups of men as lease inspectors to scout ‘unoccupied’ areas and provide reports on pastoral opportunities in order to document the land that these Australian companies planned to use. As a lease inspector, Stockdale worked for the Cambridge Downs Pastoral Association (CDPA) who held leases covering 8000 km of territory in Australia (Overton 2021: 15). He also worked for the CDPA’s rival, the Kimberley Investment Association (KIA) which held over 20,000 km area.

Stockdale’s first expedition of seven men started from the Cambridge Gulf on September 13, 1884. This trip went poorly and his personal travel journals held at the State Library,

New South Wales Australia documented this specific trip. He also reported on his trips to the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, with his reports published in the 1888 *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, New South Wales Branch*. However, neither of these reports mention collecting any of the three skulls that later came to the PRM (Stockdale 1884; Stockdale 1888). Stockdale traveled in this same Kimberley region again the following year, and then to Port Essington and the Alligator River in the Northern Territory in 1891. The 1884 Eastern Kimberley expedition is especially insightful into Stockdale's collecting ethos. On this trip, Stockdale's men had violent interactions with local people, with incidents including Stockdale's party shooting at people they passed on trails and general hostility towards the people in the area. On this trip, the group encountered an Aboriginal camp composed of seven warriors who were with women and children and who clearly wished the white men gone. After Stockdale fired a warning shot, the Aboriginals withdrew but shadowed the party the next day (Overton 2021: 20). Following this encounter with the local people, the traveling party "found a large gallery of Aboriginal rock art, depicting emus, kangaroos, possums, frogs, platypus and an Aboriginal in corroboree" (Overton 2021: 20). One member of the group made a couple of rough sketches of the rock art, but despite Stockdale's later reputation as an artist and collector of Aboriginal implements, he apparently made no sketches of the rock art (Overton 2021: 20). Sometime during these three expeditions, Stockdale gained possession of three skulls in this case study.

In Stockdale's expedition journals there is no mention of collecting any skulls. Stockdale occluded this information, which could indicate that the collection of human remains was not noteworthy to him. Hence, the exact location these skulls were taken from is

undetermined, but the PRM catalogue lists the collection locations for these three skulls as:

1900.55.308: Queensland General
1900.55.309 (painted): Potentially collected from a beach on Melville
Island, Northern Territory Tiwi Islands
1900.55.310: New South Wales South Head

It is unclear how these locations of collection were determined, as Stockdale's journals make no mention of such acquisitions. However, this research does not aim to fill these gaps through additional provenance research. Instead, it seeks to address the impact of these gaps directly by probing into their implications.

Ultimately, Stockdale exerted violent imperial pressures, but his role in the brutality of the British Empire in Australia is hidden in the archive. In most biographies about Stockdale, he is referred to as an explorer. In 1894 in *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Robert Etheridge Jr. refers to Stockdale as the source of their collection of musical instruments, calling him a “traveler and explorer” (Etheridge 1894: 320). More current biographies made available by Design and Art Australia Online refer to Stockdale as a sketcher, collector, explorer and horseman (“Biography” Design and Art Australia Online 1992). In the book *Histories of Australian Rock Art Research* he is called “explorer Harry Stockdale” (Frederick et. al 2022: 217). In the book *Cape York Peninsula* he is referred to as “Australian explorer Harry Stockdale, an experienced bushman” (Wallace 2012: 88). In historical and modern records, Stockdale's position as a lease inspector for a squatting company has been occluded so that the duress is less identifiable. Stockdale is also only able to collect because of the violent occupation of the land. Stockdale was able to steal human skulls from Australia because he was working for companies who were actively stealing land from Australian people. Like Clement, he is enabled by the larger scale of the extractive system. This dual extraction has been

discussed by scholars such as Chip Colwell, author of *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits: Inside the Fight to Reclaim Native America's Culture*. Colwell's 2017 book examined the ethical implications of collecting practices in the context of American colonialism and violence and demonstrates how the acquisition of cultural artifacts by collectors and museums has been intertwined with colonialism and the displacement of Indigenous peoples. This type of dual extraction is also reflected in the work of Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) where he argues that colonial powers not only exploit the material resources of colonized territories but also engage in the extraction and manipulation of cultural elements. Fanon argues that colonialism is not merely a matter of economic exploitation and political domination but also involves a profound assault on the cultural identity and dignity of colonized peoples. With this in mind, understanding this situation of acquisition must confront this dual extraction, despite the fact that it has been deliberately occluded.

After Stockdale, the three skulls came into the possession of Norman H. Hardy. Hardy was a British artist who spent seven years in Australia. He had become a member of the Royal Anthropological Institute just a year before his departure to Australia and collected many of his own cultural artefacts from Australian people. The same non-public internal PRM archive biographies for Norman Hardy say the following:

Hardy lived in London as a young man and spent much of his spare time visiting museums, through which he developed an interest in material culture. After leaving school he became an illustrator, painting for Beddoe's 'Races of Mankind' in 1883 and other works. In 1891 he sailed for Australia where he was employed by the Sydney Morning Herald as resident artist. In 1891, Hardy and Stockdale went on an expedition together to the Port Essington and Alligator River regions in the Northern Territory. This was the only time that they travelled together. Among the objects in the Hardy collection in the Pitt Rivers Museum (donated by R. F. Wilkins), the majority of the Australian pieces were collected by Stockdale and then sold to Hardy. After traveling in Australia, Hardy traveled all over the Pacific and Asia (including China). He continued to illustrate books, including 'The Savage South Seas' and 'Women of all Nations'. Hardy also accompanied

the explorer Emil Forday to Africa in 1907, as a painter, to document the two year project. (Coote 2008: 1; Appendix A)

According to this internal biography at the PRM, Hardy and Stockdale had travelled together in the Port Essington and Alligator River regions of Australia in 1891 and therefore knew each other. Most of Stockdale's collections were then sold to Hardy. Later, a large portion of Hardy's collections were eventually sold to Robert F. Wilkins (Coote 2008: 1). After these collections spent time in Wilkins' ownership, a large portion was donated to the PRM. This donation included the three human skulls (1900.55.308, 1900.55.309, 1900.55.310). We do know that materials donated to the PRM from Hardy's collections have been recorded as excavated from a grave (Hicks & Stevenson 2013: 538). However, according to an email from the PRM Head of Collections in 2008, "All we know about Wilkins is that he was Balfour's wife's father and lived in Kingswear, South Devon. It is, of course, perfectly understandable that he should have given collections to the Museum being run by his daughter's husband. Unfortunately, we do not seem to know why, when, or where he obtained the Hardy / Stockdale collection, though according to the records here we know that he purchased it" (Coote 2008: 1; Appendix A).

In this case, there is a wealth of biographical detail of the collectors which stands in direct contrast to the absent or redacted biographies and identities of the 'collected.' The collectors are often well-documented, with their backgrounds, achievements, and personal histories thoroughly recorded and even celebrated. For Clement, we know where he was born, where he taught in Yorkshire, when and where he traveled, who he was friends with, and how he felt about his travels and acquisitions. With Stockdale, we know similar information, including that he visited the National Art Gallery of New South Wales on May May 1893 with a young Aboriginal man in his employ and met the

Archduke Franz Ferdinand (Miller 2021). The archive even delivers a poem Stockdale wrote in 1891 titled “Australia’s Heroes” (Stockdale 1891). His poem is especially revealing, as it indicated the Stockdale is aware of the immortality that can be achieved by his actions, writing: “The famous deeds of famous men Are told in deathless story” (Stockdale 1891). He also writes of his pride at being English, saying that he has “read from old lords’ history, The stories of my race, And have felt my blood course faster Because of my birthplace” (Stockdale 1891). In this sense, the archive allows researchers to know our field collectors intimately, sharing not only their names and deeds but their thoughts and inner lives.

This wealth of information about these field collectors paints a comprehensive picture of their lives, motivations, and the contexts in which they operated. On the other hand, the ‘collected’—those who were gathered, studied, or even exploited—are rendered invisible in historical records. Their personal histories, cultural contexts, and individual identities are missing, either due to a lack of documentation or intentional redaction. This absence is not merely an oversight but frequently a result of systemic practices that devalue and erase the experiences and identities of marginalized groups. This is the outcome of such redactions. This disparity in biographical detail between collectors and the collected is not merely an academic observation but a profound reflection of societal power dynamics. It underscores who historically has been deemed worthy of remembrance and whose lives have been consigned to obscurity or marginalization. It raises fundamental questions about whose stories are told and whose identities are affirmed in the construction of historical narratives. This disparity in information is linked to issues of who gets to be “human” and who does not. Clement and Stockdale are human, but the human remains they collected are not.

This section has briefly examined the occlusions of taking surrounding the imperial connections of the collectors of five of the six human remains. For Stockdale and Clement, their careers in colonial extraction are occluded in the archive and distance them from the violence of the Australian occupation. However, regarding the sixth skull (1887.33.26: female skull with ochre from Oxford University Museum of Natural History), there is no information about its field collection at all. We only know that it is a young woman's skull that has been painted with ochre. There is no information about the acquisition of this skull except that it came to the PRM as a transfer from another Oxford museum. As such, we must now move our investigation into the museum.

4.3 Labels and Catalogue Entries

As discussed, occlusions typically manifest in two distinct ways: firstly, by concealing the humanity of colonized peoples, and secondly, by obscuring the extent of violence inflicted upon them. This section will predominantly focus on how these types of occlusions manifest in the inscriptions provided by museums, particularly through interpretive labels and catalogue entries. Whereas the preceding section delved into occlusions resulting from acquisition, this segment investigates occlusions stemming from retention. As such, this research now turns to what information is actually available and communicated to the public through labels and catalogue entries. For the human penis collected by Clement, there is an existing record in the archive of a retired label, pictured below (Image C).

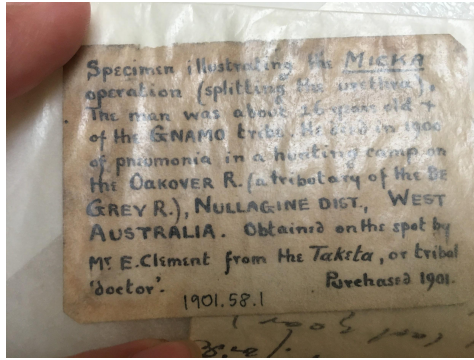


Image C: Label for 1901.58.1, photograph taken by author

In the museum's archive, this label becomes the last and most substantial piece of existing information available about this man. Most importantly, the label excludes Clement's bribery, instead describing Clement's payoff as having been "obtained on the spot." The archive shows that when this subject was purchased from Clement, the museum knew that it was obtained via bribery, as Clement had confessed this to the PRM in his May 1901 letter. However, that information is redacted from this description. The archive continues to allow this redaction to perpetuate itself by not including this information. Obscuring the power dynamics of the bribe and presenting this exchange without this key information is an occlusion that disguises the violence of imperial field collecting in the same way that the occlusion of Clement's connections to natural resource mining in his field collector biography shields the museological acquisition from a connection to imperial duress.

The PRM is aware of the potential for labels to enact violence. At the PRM, projects like Labeling Matters, headed by Marenka Odlum, are concerned with the ways that labels in museums are harnessed to powerful historical narratives that have been specifically constructed to support a story of colonial domination. This tendency for labels to support racist narratives and interpretations in museums more generally has also been

documented, for example in Esther Momand's article "Conceptual Violence in the Museum: A Brief Look at the Colonial Legacy in Art Museums, as Seen through a History of Harm and Misrepresentation in Museum Knowledge Organization Practices," which argues that the legacy of conceptual violence continues to shape museum practices today, influencing how exhibitions are curated, labels are written, and collections are interpreted (2023). However, for the purposes of this research, it is mainly important to note what these labels are missing, namely, Clement's bribe.

Next, this section turns to consider catalogue entries. The online catalogue entry for this same human penis is even more diminished than the historic label and contains even less information. However, the PRM online collections no longer provide any information on these returned subjects. This change occurred during the course of my doctoral studies when the PRM collections database underwent a transition to a new format for public access. Consequently, the details pertaining to these returned subjects are no longer accessible to the public in the new online collections database. As a result, the information from the online catalog seen above is no longer available online, representing another form of occlusion. However, I had captured numerous screenshots during my initial research before the launch of the new online collections database, and I also managed to locate documentation of the original catalogue entries. Therefore, I have included the PRM catalogue information for these human remains collected by Clement below:

1901.58.1

Human penis. [CW 8 12 97]

Place details: AUSTRALIA. Australia / Western Australia Nullagine District Oakover River. Cultural Group: Australia, Nyamal: Local Name: Unknown. Materials: Human Body Part / ?. Processes: ?. Field Collector: Emile Louis Bruno Clement ? When Collected: 1900 Other Owners: Emile Louis Bruno Clement PRM Source: Emile Louis Bruno Clement Acquired: Purchased May 1901

KEYWORD: Human Body Part / CLASS: Physical Anthropology / Religion
/ Medicine / Status / ?.

Specifically, this catalogue entry does not mention that it is from a 26 year old Gnamo man who died of pneumonia. Given that it is rare to even have information about age or cause of death, the omission of this information from the catalogue is noteworthy.

However, there are discrepancies again, as the historical label from the museum notes this man's age as 16 (Image C), but Clement's 1901 letter to the PRM says that the man was 26 (Image B). Regarding the catalogue entries for the skulls taken by Stockdale (1900.55.308, 1900.55.309, 1900.55.310), I have included the former catalogue entries for the Stockdale skulls here:

1900.55.308

Skull.

Australia, Queensland.

Originally accessioned as 'Human skull showing knocking out of upper central incisor teeth at the initiation of youths into manhood. QUEENSLAND: Probably collected by Harry Stockdale, collection of Norman H. Hardy (308); purchased from Hardy by Robert Francis Wilkins who donated it to the PRM in 1900.

1900.55.309

Skull.

Australia, Northern Territory, Melville Island (Tiwi?).

Originally accessioned as 'Beach of Melville I[slan]D, N[orth]. A[ustralia]. Human skull showing knocking out of upper central incisor teeth at the initiation of youths into manhood'.

Probably collected by Harry Stockdale, collection of Norman H. Hardy (309); purchased from Hardy by Robert Francis Wilkins who donated it to the PRM in 1900.

1900.55.310

Skull.

Australia, New South Wales, South Head.

Originally accessioned as Human skull showing knocking out of upper central incisor teeth at the initiation of youths into manhood. SOUTH HEAD, N.S.W
Probably collected by Harry Stockdale, collection of Norman H. Hardy (310); Purchased from Hardy by Robert Francis Wilkins who donated it to the PRM in 1900. ("1900.55.308-310" Related Document Files. Pitt Rivers Museum)

Here we see that occlusions grow in the museum as information that was once available begins to disappear. For example, the catalogue information has diminished from what is shown above, and then eventually becoming unavailable to public audiences online. To understand this, we can look to anthropological theories of archives such as those from Carolyn Steedman. In *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* by Steedman, she explores the relationship between personal memory, historical records, and the construction of narratives. Steedman uses her own family history and experiences as a starting point to delve into broader questions about how we remember and interpret the past. The book centers around the author's discovery of a suitcase filled with documents related to her family's history, including letters, photographs, and official records. Through examining these artifacts, Steedman reflects on the nature of archives and the stories they contain. One of the key themes introduced by Steedman is the idea of "dust" as both a physical residue and a metaphor for the fragments of memory that accumulate over time. Regarding dust, Steedman writes of "the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone" (2001: 164). This idea reflects the archival process seen here, wherein information disappears.

Moreover, some catalogue information exists without explanation or reasoning. For example, the location information on the PRM records name South Australia as the origin of the skulls, but this appears with no explanation of how that information was determined. Further, the catalogue entry for 1900.55.309 says one of the skulls was collected from a beach on Melville island, but there is no record of that collection within the current archival files related to this return. Zena McGreevey's 1998 masters dissertation while she was a student at Oxford documented this return. According to her, her work intended to add nuance to discussions of returns. She notes that restitution arguments tend to present returns as straightforwardly either pro or against, but her work

aims to complicate this idea and argues that “the repatriation process is more complex than these forms of argument tend to suggest” (McGreevey 1998: 5).

McGreevey’s thesis reported the same locational data as seen in the catalogue entries on the collection of the skull as being from Melville Island, but with no indications of how Melville Island was determined as the site of collection in Australia. McGreevey notes that her research was heavily based on correspondence on conversations with staff. Her work occurred only eight years after the return had occurred and it is clear that she was able to talk to individuals who had been involved in the return. We also know that documents go missing in archives. It is therefore possible that more information was available two decades ago during her time at Oxford, but is now unavailable. The issue here is that as the museum continues to function, information tends to get lost. The archive is not perpetually frozen but will continue to deteriorate. The archive is not a static entity. Instead, it is subject to various factors that contribute to its gradual deterioration. These factors can include physical decay of materials, improper storage conditions, accidental damage, or loss during handling. Documents are misplaced or filed in surprising locations. Additionally, as new items are added and the collection grows, the task of maintaining and organizing the archive becomes increasingly complex. This could be considered as a type of museological entropy, a concept which borrows from the idea of entropy in physics and which describes a natural tendency towards disorder and chaos within closed systems. In a museum context, this entropy can manifest in several ways, affecting both the physical condition of objects and their interpretative value wherein archives become disordered, degraded, or lose their context and meaning over time. In this case, the loss of the documents which recorded Melville Island as the collection points may be caused by entropy, but in some cases it can also be caused by research, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

For the other remains involved in this case study, specifically the ochre painted skull of a woman (1887.33.26), there is even less information available. As discussed, the painted skull has no information about its acquisition in the field, and its archival history begins at Oxford, when it was transferred to the PRM from the Oxford Museum of Natural History (OUMNH). At the PRM, the records relating to this skull indicate mostly information about the skull itself, saying that it is a female skull from South Australia with ochre and bone and came to the PRM via OUMNH. See plain text of catalogue entry below.

1887.33.26

Human skull. Adult female. [CW 8 12 97]

Place details: AUSTRALIA. Australia / South Australia. Local Name: Unknown.

Materials: Ochre / Human Bone /?. Processes: ?. Field Collector:

Unknown When Collected: By 1887 Other Owners: Department of Comparative Anatomy, University Museum, Oxford (later Oxford University Museum of Natural History); from 1887 2, PRM.

PRM Source: Department of Comparative Anatomy, University Museum, Oxford (later Oxford University Museum of Natural History) Acquired: Transferred 1887 Other Numbers: 1016a

KEYWORD: Skull / CLASS: Physical Anthropology / ?. ("1887.33.26". Related Document Files. Pitt Rivers Museum)

This PRM entry points us to further information from the OUMNH, noting that the skull was transferred between the Oxford museums in 1887. This time period included many transfers between the Oxford museums, as discussed in Chapter Two. There had been many transfers of material in the late 1800s and this skull had been a part of one.

However, these transfers of materials between collections make information difficult to track. Ultimately, OUMNH's records reveal even less about the woman's painted skull.

Their records do not describe her bones, nor do they record that it is a woman's skull or that it is painted. However, their records do offer more information to track how this skull was traded between collections in the late 1800s, as they describe the female skull with ochre as having been purchased at a sale in 1883. The typed catalogue entry at the

OUMNH, visible in Image D below, says: “1016a. Australia. Unknown locality. Skulls. Transferred to Pitt Rivers Museum, therefore not renumbered. Purchased at a sale in 1883.” A fractured stamp over the entry reads: “Not in collection.”

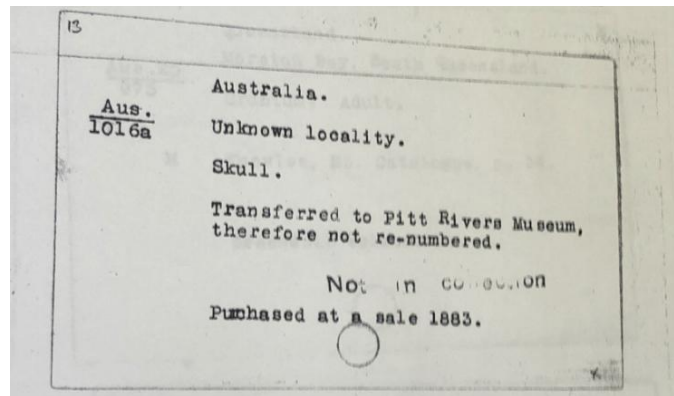


Image D: OUMNH Catalogue entry for 1016a, photograph taken by author

I attempted to find records of this 1883 purchase by the OUMNH, for example looking to records at Sotheby's and Christie's because both companies have been in business since the 1700s and might potentially have records of these sales, but I was not able to find any further documentation for this ochred skull. Unfortunately, though OUMNH recorded their donations in 1883, there is no existing record of their purchases in 1883, so I cannot track its location history beyond this time. This illuminates one of the ways that archives support the construction of narratives. Since the OUMNH did not record any of their purchases, their processes functioned to not document any information on purchases despite their detailed records regarding donations.

Again, here we see information appearing without justification; there is no mention of South Australia in the earlier OUMNH records for the female skull (1887.33.26), leading one to question why it appears in the later PRM records for the female skull. Certain

knowledge about why this woman's ochre-adorned skull is in the PRM and not buried in Australia is simply unavailable, no matter how much diligent provenance research is done. Ultimately, anthropological structures influence the decision of which information is chosen for preservation and the rest is discarded. In this case, the archival process has stripped human bodies of their status as humans, turning them into museum objects. It was while I worked through the OUMNH records from 1883 that the curator apologized because they could not provide much help. The archive had been specifically constructed to exclude all of the information that I would need to think about these colonial power dynamics surrounding returns. The violence of colonialism is the very cause of this lack of information, and the lack of information perpetuates its own dehumanizing violence in turn.

Trouillot (1995: 53) outlined the idea of silencing as a historiographical concept involving the active erasure of histories which do not align with the preferred narratives of supremacy and conquest. In this work, I have sought out deflections and moments of silencing. One could speculate on what that information would be if it was available, in light of current understandings of colonialism. For example, this female human skull with ochre could have been purchased at an 1883 auction, with traceable provenance to a community in Australia. Or perhaps the identity of the 26-year-old Gnamo man Clement had bribed the doctor to dismember could be speculated upon in an attempt to restore humanity to the skull. However, as per Stoler's approach, rather than attempting to track that information, I have instead tried to think about what information was excluded and why, in order to demonstrate how archival practices have historically contributed to the dehumanization of colonized people's remains while distancing those remains from violence.

4.4 The Return

This section now examines the occlusions in the actual process of returning the six human remains to Australia, as well as the legacy of that return. First, it is important to remember that Australia has been engaging in restitution efforts globally for decades. Australia has a long documented history of decades of requests for returns (Cato 1997) and has established formal procedures to facilitate requests with many active, community-led groups. To facilitate the return of human remains, Australia has official processes for returns, including using the National Museum of Australia in Canberra as a designated repository which provides temporary care for human remains returned from overseas (De Alarcón 2019). Further, New South Wales and Victoria are both provinces with cemeteries for unidentified human remains (McGreevey 1998: 22). However, in 1990 these processes were still developing and there is not much documentation of this event available. Unfortunately, there have also been limited responses to requests for interviews. Furthermore, though these skulls may have been held at the National Museum of Canberra upon their return to Australia for further provenance research, there are no records at the National Museum of Canberra of any of the human remains in this case study. The previous investigation by McGreevey in 1998 into the return of these six human remains in 1990 also yielded similar limited results in that she was unable to determine any final locations for these human remains, despite the fact that her main goal was to “focus on what happened once the remains reached Australia” (McGreevey 1998: 5). She also notes that she experienced a similar problem in that she was unable to contact any of the Australian individuals who worked on this return (McGreevey 1998: 5). Despite this missing information, this research will attempt to examine the story of this return and its gaps.

The story of this return begins with Michael A. Mansell, who was born in 1951 in Northern Tasmania and studied and practiced as a lawyer before becoming a founding member of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) in 1972. In 1985 Mansell toured 10 countries in three months on behalf of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service as a part of a “Journey for Dignity” (Fulton 1985: 2). He visited Switzerland, France, Holland, Scotland, Germany, Sweden, Ireland, England and the USA. In each place, his focus was on “negotiating with Governments and the administration of museums and universities to have Tasmanian Aboriginal remains returned” (Fulton 1985: 2). His first appointment with a museum was at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris, France. At the Musée de l’Homme, the:

heads of nine Aborigines and the pelvis of another who died in the 1830s were displayed in the anthropological wing of the Paris museum... They had been sent to Europe by George Augustus Robinson, known as ‘the protector of Aborigines’, along with Aboriginal artefacts, between 1829–39. (Fulton 1985: 3)

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre had urgently requested that the Minister for Foreign Affairs make the formal request to France for the return of these human remains from the Musée de l’Homme. The return was successful, with the TAC secretary commenting that “the remains returned would be cremated in the traditional way” (Fulton 1985: 3). At long last, a final burial and resting place.

Five years after negotiating a successful return from the Parisian museum, Mansell departed to “retrieve the head of Mansell’s great-great-grandfather from the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin” (Elliott 2010a: 2). Mansell’s trip was funded by the Aboriginal Land Councils and he intended to survey what Indigenous remains were in other UK museums. Mansell was joined by Bob Weatherall, a fellow activist from south west Queensland. Of this trip, Weatherall commented: “When we went to the University

of Edinburgh, for example, we had expected to find 50 remains... By the time we left we had found 300” (Elliott 2010a: 2).

During this trip, Mansell and Weatherall visited the Pitt Rivers Museum on March 14, 1990 and requested a return of all aboriginal remains in the museum. They were met by the director of the PRM and Howard Morphy, whereupon they submitted a formal request for restitution. In response, the “Director recommended to the Pitt Rivers Committee that five skulls and a sample of soft tissue (a pickled penis) be returned” (1989–90 Annual Report). All six human remains were returned on June 15, 1990, when the official handover of the remains occurred, from the PRM Director Schuyler Jones to Mansell and Karno Walker of the Watch Committee for Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The five skulls and one penis in formaldehyde was the very first return facilitated by the Pitt Rivers Museum.

This return from the PRM was part of a wider process of returns from other UK institutions during this time. Edinburgh University’s Anatomical Museum returned “a single skull to Ceylon which is now Sri Lanka in 1947” (MacCallum 2023). In 1976, the Royal College of Surgeons in London returned the remains of Tasmanian Aboriginal people to Australia. In the 1990s, another group of returns to human remains occurred with restitutions from Edinburgh University’s Anatomical Museum to Tasmania, mainland Australia, and New Zealand. Therefore, this return came within a broader repatriation movement. However, it was also innovative because it did not place conditions on the return and was quickly facilitated. This is likely due to the fact that the curator who worked on this process, Schuyler Jones, had a North American background and the United States of America had been confronting these issues through NAGPRA.

In the period of this first PRM return in 1990, much information was consciously occluded from the public. These occlusions include concealment of information such as how the institution made the decision, concerns about publicity, and the status and validity of requests. As such, this work will now reconstruct the events wherein a return was internally agreed upon at Oxford, but how information about the reasons justifying those decisions were deliberately withheld. This will demonstrate how occlusions have continued to function beyond museological acquisition and custody, and how occlusions exist in the process of return itself.

The formal request for the six human remains in this case study was made during the visit of the delegation on March 14, 1990. By June 15 of the same year, they were formally returned. Restitution claims are generally viewed as long, arduous processes, though this particular case only took three months. This timeframe could exclude research time, since the PRM curator in 1990, Schuyler Jones, said that research had actually begun the month before in “anticipation of a possible request of this kind” in February 1990 (Jones 1990: 1). In this month before the official March 1990 visit, Jones describes their research process:

Museum records were examined, the relevant materials were located, and it was decided that those skeletal and soft tissue materials which had not been made into artefacts by the Indigenous people had no place in an ethnographic museum such as the Pitt Rivers and should be returned to appropriate Australian government representatives or representatives of Australian Aboriginal groups as soon as arrangements could be made. (Jones 1990: 1)

As such, a month before a request had even been made, the PRM held a “curatorial meeting” in February 1990 specifically to discuss a potential request for returns (“Minutes of a Curatorial Meeting Held in the Directors Room on Tuesday 13 February 1990 at 9:30am” 1990). The first item on the agenda was about a potential Australian request, and the meeting minutes explain that there had been a recent television

program drawing attention to the fact that British museums held lots of Australian materials. I was not able to find records of which specific television program this was, but my searches of the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) collection reveal that around 1990, Australian television saw a large increase in the amount of the discussion about British museums and Aboriginal skeletal remains. For example, a month after this curatorial meeting, the Capital Television Station in Australia featured a segment on British Museums on March 22, 1990. Further, three months after this February 1990 curatorial meeting at the PRM, an Australian show called “Murrie Affairs” was aired by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on May 14, 1990. In this program, the Aboriginal Liaison Officer with the Australia Heritage Commission David Johnson spoke to presenter Jenni Geia about the role of the Australia Heritage Commission, and Carol Gartside from the Australian Museum spoke about Aboriginal skeletal remains in museums. As such, it is clear that public awareness was increasing around the issue of Australian human remains in museums.

In this February 1990 curatorial meeting at the PRM, a month before the request had been made, a curator at the PRM named Howard Morphy suggested that the museum should look to the Smithsonian museum’s policy for guidance. The Smithsonian’s policy was to return skeletal material and Morphy suggested that despite the North American context, the framework could apply to their Australian collections held in England and noted that some English museums were already developing similar policies. However, the meeting minutes indicate that the discussion then turned to a question of scientific value. There was concern that if the human remains were classed as prehistory that they should not be returned; however, the PRM quickly determined that none of the Australian material at the PRM was prehistoric. This discussion finally led to the formulation of a policy to handle potential returns. The minutes read that:

It was agreed that there was no reason for non-artifactual human remains to be retained in the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum. To this end the following policy was formulated: If the return of purely anatomical human material, not made into Indigenous artefacts, were formally requested from the Museum by a bona fide organisation of descendants of the group from which that material came, or their designated representatives, the Museum would be prepared to recommend to the Pitt Rivers Committee the return of such material for disposal. (Pitt Rivers Committee Meeting Minutes 1990).

A month after this meeting, Mansell and Weatherall visited the PRM and made a formal request on March 14, 1990. Two months after that formal request and visit in March, the Pitt Rivers Committee met on Tuesday, May 8, 1990. In this meeting, the committee agreed that the Statutes, Decrees and Regulations of the PRM allowed this return to occur. The statute that the committee followed was:

The Curator shall have power, subject to the concurrence of the Committee for the Pitt Rivers Museum, to delete from the registers of the Museum and to remove permanently from the collection: (1) Any object deemed to be or to have become, by material degradation or otherwise, devoid of artistic, historical, ethnological, or archaeological value, or otherwise irrelevant to the purposes of the Museum. (Jones 1990)

The final verdict was that items could leave the collection if they no longer served the purpose of the museum. The argument was that, since these human remains were not culturally modified in any way, they did not belong in an ethnographic museum. Similarly to what the curatorial meeting had decided, “there was no reason for non-artifactual human remains to be retained in the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum” (curatorial meeting 1990). The PRM curatorial meeting policy aligned with the use of the statutes in this PRM Committee Meeting, the twofold process resulting in an agreement.

However, it is significant that this element of policy was not revealed to the public. The curator, Schuyler Jones, had justified the committee’s choices to the registrar AJ Dorey by saying that “it was decided that those skeletal and soft tissue materials which had not been made into artefacts by the Indigenous people had no place in an ethnographic

museum such as the Pitt Rivers” (Jones 1990: 1). However, in a letter on May 29 marked as STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL, registrar A.J. Dorey replied to Jones saying that this reasoning should not be advertised. Dorey says that the Oxford University Council believed that revealing the use of this policy for a return would have “damaging implications” for the university and for the wider sphere of academia. In Dorey’s letter to Jones, he says:

There would obviously be potentially very damaging implications, for the University and for academic studies generally, if it were ever proposed to surrender objects which were still relevant to the purposes of the institution in which they were held. Clearly it would not be sensible to lay emphasis, in returning the Pitt Rivers material, on this last point, which would readily (and rightly) be interpreted as meaning that the items in question would not have been returned if they had been relevant to the purposes of the museum! (Dorey 1990)

Dorey relates that Council worried that revealing this policy might insinuate that the materials would not have been repatriated if they had fit the purpose of the museum. This is the same concern voiced in the curatorial meeting earlier that year, when the committee agreed that prehistory might be excluded from a return. Their view that returning materials that are relevant to the museum is “potentially very damaging” reveals a perspective on how the boundaries of the culture museum and anthropology itself have shifted and no longer encompass human remains, but there are efforts to keep that knowledge private within Oxford. Here, Council cautions against setting a precedent.

Next door, the OUMNH was also concerned about precedent. Stephen Eeley, the OUMNH administrator at the time, sent a letter to the PRM on June 18, 1990 saying that the OUMNH wanted more information about this PRM request and return because of how it would affect them at the OUMNH (Appendix B). He wrote that he was “concerned that the OUM should understand what its position is in the light of the recent

developments and know how to act should an approach be made” (Eeley 1990). The main issue here was the same concern that the council had expressed through Dorey: that what the PRM did would set a precedent for the other Oxford University museums.

This concern was consistently kept private. On April 24, 1990, the PRM committee had discussed the request and whether the PRM was willing to facilitate the return. The committee decided it would be a group decision, rather than the choice of the curator alone, because of the huge precedent it would set. However, this reasoning and the concerns about precedent were not included in the minutes of this meeting. In his letter to the PRM, the OUMNH administrator Stephen Eeley wrote that “it was also agreed but not minuted that Dr. Jones would not act on his own in this matter as the implications of one museum returning collections were considerable” (Eeley 1990). These concerns were deliberately excluded from official documents, discoverable only in personal correspondence. A few weeks after these letters are exchanged between Jones and Dorey on behalf of the council, the return is formally made.⁴

The effort to hide this information is internally explained as a concern about creating a precedent. The concern about creating precedent is an acknowledgement that this cultural extraction is a systemic issue. Given the concerns voiced by the OUMNH in their letter, this indicates that everyone understood that this systemic issue transcends disciplines and also involves natural history and sciences, and not just anthropology or archaeology. These are occlusions created by the functions of museums generally. This is not a conspiracy, but rather a manifestation of institutional violence. Institutional violence operates through systemic and entrenched practices within organizations and

⁴ I would like to note a small but critical occlusion here: in his May 1990 letter to Dorey, Schuyler had called the process a “disposal” before personally handing the human remains to the Australian representatives over that June. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, framing deaccessions or disposals as returns is generally inaccurate; in most cases, returned materials are not disposed of, but are used in community processes.

societal structures that perpetuate harm, marginalization, or injustice. Unlike direct, physical violence, institutional violence is often subtle and normalized, making it more challenging to identify and address. A key aspect of institutional violence is the normalization of harm. Harmful practices can become routine and accepted within institutions, making them less visible and more difficult to challenge. Institutions can perpetuate disparities through their structures and policies which reinforce existing inequities. Exclusion and marginalization are additional components of institutional violence. Certain groups may be systematically excluded from decision-making processes or have their needs ignored, leading to a lack of representation and advocacy. This exclusion further entrenches systemic inequities and prevents meaningful change. In this case, rather than these occlusions being the product of individuals acting deliberately, we see these occlusions as manifestations of institutional violence.

4.5 Missing-ness

The last section has documented occlusions which worked to hide administrative information from the public, but there are also occlusions in this case study that are a product of the structures of museums more generally. In this instance, the disappearance of an entire skeleton serves as an illustration of how anthropological museums can effectively make humans disappear. In the original March 1990 request for return by the Australian delegation, a full female skeleton that was documented as being part of the PRM collections was also included in the list of subjects to be returned (1921.72.1). The skeleton is described in the catalogue with the following information:

1921.72.1 - Female skeleton. Provenance: N.E. Queensland, Mount Windsor, head of the Palmer River, circa 100 miles SW of Cooktown. Collected by Mr D. J. FitzGibbon of Esk, Queensland. Given or purchased from him by Dr Guy L'Estrange who then donated it to the Pitt Rivers Museum in 1921. (R/D/F accession files 1921.72.1)

Despite being included in the claim for return, there was a problem: the skeleton that had been requested was missing. In this case, tangible dispossession is evident in the systemic violence of colonial archives which made an entire human disappear. In the first curatorial meeting in advance of the initial 1990 visit and formal request, the group had noted that not everything that was recorded as being held in their collections was able to be located. In fact, there was a lot of material that could not be found. This could be due to the period of massive transfers between museums in Oxford and London that was discussed earlier. In an email from the PRM Head of Collections Jeremy Coote to the PRM director Michael O'Hanlon in August 2004 available in Appendix D, Coote posits that the museum had "presumed that [1921.72.1] had probably gone to the Natural History Museum in London to which material was transferred from Comparative Anatomy some years before" (Coote 2004: 1). This loss could also be simply due to the poor documentation practices of the time. This type of loss within museological collections is not rare. Museological artefacts often go missing or are lost within large institutions and that is not unique to this case study. In "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage" report from 2018, Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy stated that a total number of repatriable materials housed in museums in France "would be difficult to estimate" (Sarr and Savoy 2018: 111). Basically, there is so much stuff in museums that we don't even know what we have.

Regardless of the cause, human remains were missing. This type of "missing-ness" has been discussed by Rousseau, Moosage, and Rassool in "Missing and Missed: Rehumanisation, the Nation and Missing-ness" from 2018. In this article, the authors describe how individuals who are deemed missing often undergo a process of dehumanization, marginalized within societal narratives and structures. Their article explores the ways in which individuals who are missing, whether due to forced

disappearance, migration, or other factors, are often excluded or overlooked within national narratives and discourses. Basically, they argue that for materials and subjects in collections, they are still factually missing. Rousseau, Moosage, and Rassool introduce the concept of missing-ness, arguing that it extends beyond mere absence, embodying a profound loss that reverberates through both individual lives and national consciousness. By interrogating the societal responses to those who are missing, their article illuminates the ways in which these responses shape perceptions of belonging, recognition, and memory within the larger social fabric. With this idea of missing-ness in mind, the loss of an entire human body is an extremely violent and physical occlusion and tangible dispossession.

Rousseau, Moosage, and Rassool also refer to bodies lost in museums as “disappeared” and link this museological extractive violence to political prisoners. This is a useful orientation to consider subjects in museums, as medical history museums often follow policies which ban this type of museological use. For example, in 2021 an exhibition called “Real Bodies” in Birmingham was discussed in UK parliament when it was found that the human remains used in the exhibition “were probably people who had been executed” in China (Ruiz 2021: 2). In this case, the exhibition features bodies which had been “stripped of their skin, dissected to show a part of their internal anatomy and then infused with plastic, which gradually hardened, a process known as plastination” (Ruiz 2021: 2). However, the “Real Bodies” exhibition had sourced these bodies from a company in Dalian, China “which has used corpses acquired from the Chinese police, according to a previous investigation by the New York Attorney General’s Office” (Ruiz 2021: 2). As such, this particular “Real Bodies” exhibition in Birmingham was used in Parliament as an example to consider a proposed amendment to the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill which would “require all human tissues and

cells imported into Britain for medical or scientific purposes to be fully documented with evidence that they were obtained with the consent of the donor” (Ruiz 2021: 2). Under this new legislation, political prisoners from China would be considered unlawful for museum use. Medical history museums also deal with human remains in collections, so if this ethical boundary for medical history museums is borrowed and brought into the field of world culture museums, we might find new ways to think about the human remains in anthropological museum collections.

Ultimately, losing a whole human being within the museum is a violent form of loss. In “Storage as a Form of Violence” by Fernando Domínguez Rubio from 2021, Rubio examines how the storage of human remains in colonial museums perpetuates violence and argues that the act of storage itself, as well as the ways in which human remains are catalogued, displayed, and treated within museum collections, reflects and reinforces colonial power dynamics and cultural hierarchies. More specifically, Rubio writes that “any form of keeping entails a form of loss as its necessary and unavoidable shadow” (Rubio 2021: 29). This aligns with what is seen in this case of the missing skeleton (1921.72.1), as the keeping of the museum also creates a form of loss. Exploring the implications of this dual nature of keeping and begetting loss is important, as Rubio writes that “understanding how loss is created in the name of care in the silence of storages, is key to revealing the uneven geographies of power and dispossession” (Rubio 2021: 29). As such, Fernando Domínguez Rubio’s exploration of the violent repercussions of storing human remains in colonial museums sheds light on the inherent loss embedded within the act of preservation, emphasizing the need to critically examine the power dynamics and dispossession perpetuated by anthropological museums.

The skeleton in question (1921.72.1) was eventually found in an offsite storage building in 1993. However, in an email discussing this potential return now that the skeleton had been located, PRM staff member Jeremy Coote tells the PRM director Michael O'Hanlon that this return might not be possible. The return of this full skeleton still has not occurred, despite conversations as recently as 2004 between the PRM and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee (ATSAC). This potential return of the women's skeleton is discussed in an internal 2004 email, with the PRM curator Jeremy Coote saying that Schuyler Jones had already been in contact with Australian representatives a decade ago in 1993 when the missing skeleton had finally been located. In 1993, Jones had been in contact with Dr. Luke Taylor at the National Museum of Australia, and Mr. Michael Davis and Roger Dobb of The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Coote said that the potential return had lost momentum after ATSIC indicated it would consult "the wishes of the local Aboriginal community" and keep the PRM "informed of the results of these consultations" (Coote 2004: 1). However, nothing resulted from these discussions. After explaining this, Coote goes on to say that despite the likelihood that this skeleton would have been returned in 1990 if it was located, the skeleton might not be able to be returned a decade on. Coote posits that the situation at Oxford is different in 2004, explaining that the 1990 return occurred before any policies on restitution existed at the PRM. Now that these policies exist, Coote tells the Director of the PRM that a return might no longer be possible and that "the situation has changed somewhat in the last ten years" (Coote 2004: 1).

In some ways, this woman has gone missing in the museum and the archive. This is the outcome of humans being in systems of violence. This is not deliberate on the part of people within the museum, but is part of institutional violence which operates through the systems, policies, and structures established within organizations. In Charles Dickens'

1857 novel *Little Dorrit*, he writes of The Circumlocution Office which “was (as everybody knows without being told) the most important Department under Government” (1857: 98). Dickens describes a critical yet inefficient bureaucratic office, saying that: “If another Gunpowder Plot had been discovered half an hour before the lighting of the match, nobody would have been justified in saving the parliament until there had been half a score of boards, half a bushel of minutes, several sacks of official memoranda, and a family-vault full of ungrammatical correspondence, on the part of the Circumlocution Office” (1857: 98). In this institution, there is much documentation but still Dickens writes that “numbers of people were lost in the Circumlocution Office” (Dickens 1857). Certainly, the same can be said for the museum and the archive, wherein people have been lost amidst mountains of documentation.

4.6 Missing Complaints

In this next section, I explore how requests for return themselves are occluded. In this case, twenty years after the 1990 Australian return was completed, the PRM was mentioned in news media reports by Tim Elliott from the Sydney Morning Herald in Australia. The Sydney Morning Herald reported on March 13 2010 on a request for Australian drinking skulls that was initiated with the PRM in 2008. This article laments the slow process of negotiating returns with European museums and mentioning the PRM and their history of returns. This news article is now part of the archive, as it was printed and is now held in the museum’s related document files for the 1990 return. Despite the fact that this article was related to a brand new request in 2008, it was included in the RDF for the 1990 return.

Tim Elliott’s March 13th 2010 report in the Sydney Morning Herald describes how a delegation of Ngarrindjeri elders visited Oxford in 2008 and requested the return of a

Calvaria, which are skulls used as a drinking vessel. There were two of these drinking skulls in the PRM collections, 1900.55.292 and 1900.55.293, which are both listed as being from South Australia, with one skull's provenance noted as being from the mouth of the Murray River, and the other from Lake Hawdon, Guichen Bay. According to the PRM catalogue, these skulls were likely also collected by Stockdale as they also came to the PRM through the Hardy collection. On this first visit in 2008, the delegation of Ngarrindjeri elders was "told that the skulls were 'objects,' and as such were not covered by the museum's policy on human remains" (Elliott 2010b). A year later in 2009, a second delegation visited and believed that their request would this time be successful. However, Elliott writes that despite the fact that the elders believed this second visit had successfully secured the return of the drinking skulls, "in a curious turnaround, the Pitt Rivers Museum now says that they have never received any request for the return of the skulls" (Elliott 2010b: 2). Elliott's article notes that there was a frustrating lack of progress in this return, saying that:

When the Herald tried to follow up progress on the repatriation of the drinking skulls, the museum's joint head of collections, Jeremy Coote, denied ever having received a request. The Herald pointed out that the museum had been approached not once but twice by the Ngarrindjeri, in conjunction with a representative of the Australian Government. (Elliott 2010a: 4)

Within the PRM internal files, there is also a copy of the PRM's response to this newspaper article. In response to this article, PRM curator Jeremy Coote had written to the journalist with a statement of clarification. This letter to the editor reads as follows:

Letter to the Editor
Respectful talks on remains

You report that efforts to repatriate four Aboriginal "drinking skulls" held by the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford have been "spectacularly unsuccessful", although Ngarrindjeri elders have requested their return during two visits to Oxford ("Spirits cannot rest so far from home", March 13).

To set the record straight: a delegation from the Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee travelled to Oxford in 2008 to meet representatives of the Oxford University Museum of Natural History and the university's Pitt Rivers Museum.

After this visit, a formal claim for the repatriation of remains identified as Ngarrindjeri held at the Museum of Natural History was made by the heritage committee and the Australian government.

The claim was acceded to and the remains were handed over to representatives of the heritage committee last May. No formal claim has been made for remains identified as Ngarrindjeri held at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

Discussions between representatives of the Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee and the Pitt Rivers Museum have been conducted in a spirit of openness and respect, a spirit not reflected in the article. ("1901.58.1". Related Document Files. Pitt Rivers Museum)

Here, Coote reiterates the PRM position that no official request had ever been received. His letter to the editor agreed that representatives and a delegation had visited the PRM to discuss returns, as reported by Elliott. However, he says that no formal request to the PRM was made at that time. He also states that the actual formal request for restitution made by the delegation after this visit was made to the OUMNH but not to the PRM. He is correct in clarifying that these are two different museums; however, the argument holds less weight with the reminder that the two museums are both in the same building.

Elliott goes on to highlight the community reactions to the PRM's statement that no request had been received, noting the response of Sumner who said he was stunned by the PRM claim that no request had been received: "What do they think, we went all that way just to have a look at them?" (2010b). As discussed in Chapter Two, claiming that the lack of action on restitution is justifiable because no formal request has been made despite receiving alternative and significant requests is a very common argument in restitution cases. For example, the British Museum obstructed claims for the return of the Benin Bronzes by saying that no formal and official request had been received.

Bénédicte Savoy provided an in-depth history of these claims, thoroughly refuting the claim that there was no history of requests for return (2020). Hence, the PRM rejoinder that no formal request had been made for the return of Aboriginal artefacts plays into the denial of these histories.

This type of denial is also conceptualized in psychology, where the idea of “soft” denial has been identified in similar institutional processes with the concept of “cooling down” (Clark 1960: 569). In this framework, institutions use several mechanisms of soft denial, including alternative definitions of achievement, incremental rejection, agents of consolation and the dissolution of hard-and-fast standards (Clark 1960). These ideas map easily onto restitution processes in museums. Alternate definitions of achievement and agents of consolation are offered, such as long term loans, or projects to increase access. In a similar way, incremental rejection is visible in the timelines that this work has identified. In this case, the definitions of formal requests are mobilized to invalidate requests.

To consider this type of incremental rejection in museums, I look to the work of Sara Ahmed who has studied how complaint processes function at institutions, specifically in the context of sexual assault complaints. Her work in both *Complaint!* (2021) and *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use* (2019) illuminates how institutions can block complaints and highlights how administration can often be used as a stalling process. Ahmed argues that this is a powerful tool in the institutional mechanics of blocking processes, and that “if an informal complaint does not become a formal complaint, those conversations might as well, from an institutional point of view, not have happened (Ahmed 2021: 70). This tactic is evident in this first case study, when claimants believed they had made a request, but the museum stated it had not received one. Ahmed

demonstrates how this is a tactic of institutions, used to block and stall processes of complaint. Though her work focuses on sexual assault complaints, I am applying her ideas to returns as these are ultimately both complaints about experiencing violence. Ahmed demonstrates how mountains of paperwork and evasive forms become part of the institutional mechanics used to block (Ahmed 2021: 33). She describes a phenomena that might help explain the occlusions in these timelines, noting that:

On paper a complaint can appear linear, a straight line. In reality, a complaint is often more circular (round and round rather than in and out). This circularity is due to blockages: if a procedure exists in order to clear a path, that path can be blocked at any point. (Ahmed 2021: 34)

Much of Ahmed's work aligns with what is experienced in cases of return. For example, Ahmed identifies occlusions, documents, or information which appears and disappears without explanation. She says: "I have collected many stories of documents that mysteriously appear or disappear" (Ahmed 2020: 4). Ahmed also wrote that "If an inconvenient history can be erased by the failure to keep records properly, the failure to keep records properly is convenient" (Ahmed 2021: 93). Borrowing from Ahmed's work on institutional handling of sexual assault complaints might explain this phenomenon seen here. This is similar to what occurs in the archive, as this chapter has demonstrated how information appears without justification, or disappears. This idea is reflected in the fears that are shared by a *Guardian* news article from February 24 1990, following the first Australian returns from the PRM. David Langsam reports in *The Guardian* that in discussions of restitution, "Other concerns expressed include a fear that with no compulsion for disclosure, records can be destroyed to prevent claims" (Langsam 1990). These same phenomena have been noted in archival studies. For example, Carolyn Steedman's archival dust identifies similar experiences "about circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone" (2001:

164). Not only does the violent acquisition and keeping practices of anthropological collections produce occlusions, but the entire return process also produces occlusions.

4.7 Financial Duress

In keeping with the approach of this research, this section shifts focus from occlusions and endeavors to identify duress. Though I originally intended to identify occlusions and duress separately, there is a direct overlap between what is occluded and these moments of duress. For example, the bribe that Clement pays to the local doctor is a moment of acute imperial violence. In his letter to the PRM, Clement is very honest in admitting that he engaged in bribery to dismember a young man, but it is occluded in his 1904 published works and in the PRM labels and catalogue entries. The type of duress evident in bribery for human remains is easily identifiable. However, there is also the more veiled structural duress. For example, Clement is only in Australia because he is also extracting natural resources simultaneously and he was purposeful and methodical in his extraction of cultural materials. The same imperial pressures are present in the case of Stockwell, who was an enforcer of violent occupation, and his brutality against Indigenous Australians was unashamedly self-documented.

These imperial violences have been explicitly hidden, and a key learning of this case study was to discover that duress was actually my second category of occlusion. However, to fully consider the power dynamics involved in this specific case study, the occluded financial aspect of duress deserves attention. In this case, the pressures of colonial violence and imperial duress are at work in the dehumanization of human remains and their reduction to a financial equivalent. As such, one of the most important considerations for this specific case study is ascribing a price to a human body.

Ascribing a price to human remains occurred for all six of the human remains in this case. It is clear how Clement's bribe worked financially, but I will now consider the financial aspect of duress with respect to the positioning of human remains as a museological artefact. First, I would like to draw on David Graeber, who convincingly argues that ascribing a financial sum to a human life is a critical push towards dehumanizing others. In *Debt* (2011), Graeber demonstrates how quantifying a human and giving it a price equivalent is a dehumanization tool. In anthropological collecting, this dehumanization occurs because the entire system of museological collecting seen in this case study assigns a financial value to human life.

This is especially visible in the sales made by field collectors. Though it is unclear how much the PRM paid Clement for the skull and severed penis, it is clear that human remains are a source of monetary profit for many anthropological collectors, with museums offering large sums for acquisitions. For example, "correspondence records between curators and Clement suggest that the market value for collected objects was rarely disputed" (Paterson and Witcomb 2021: 210). The PRM often paid Clement's asking prices, and they purchased over 100 "ethnographic specimens from northwestern Australia for which the museum paid £11" in 1889 (Rodney 2010: 7). This would be about £1000 today. According to a woman who met Clement at Roebourne in 1901, Clement had a "comprehensive collection of native articles, which I was told he disposed of for £1,600" (Jones 2007). That would be £168,000 now. This is a pattern of profiting from the sale of the human body.

Stockdale also profited from his ethnographic sales. Stockdale's ill-fated 1884 expedition cost him over £3,000 of his own money and he attempted to offset those losses by selling what he had collected. In this case, the cultural extraction financially aided the

physical land occupation. In 1897, he showed potential collector Edge-Partington around his house and collection (Davies and Quinnell 2021: 178). In 1903, he hosted an auction which was interrupted by an unfortunate fire in which he lost his collection (Egan 2011). According to biographies made available by Design and Art Australia Online, upon his death in England in 1919, the remainder of his collection was sold, where “collections of artefacts were subsequently sold to Sir William Dixson and to an unknown European museum” (“Biography” Design and Art Australia Online 1992). Once again, human body parts were exchanged for money.

Following Graeber’s argument, a process of dehumanization is achieved by making a human have an equivalent financial cost. According to Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, this dehumanization is key for oppression, and he argues that dehumanization is central to the process of oppression and demonstrates how structures of oppression must dehumanize people in order to function (1968). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire explains that oppression occurs when one group denies the humanity of another, treating them as mere objects or instruments for their own purposes. This dehumanization allows oppressors to maintain power and control over the oppressed. By reducing individuals to objects or “things,” oppressors strip them of their agency, dignity, and ability to participate fully in society. Freire emphasizes that dehumanization is not simply a byproduct of oppression but rather a deliberate strategy employed by oppressors to justify and perpetuate their dominance.

The British Empire used this dehumanization in order to achieve the level of extraction it needed to sustain itself. Dehumanization made it easier to justify the use of violence against colonized peoples. Military actions, punitive expeditions, and harsh punishments were framed as necessary for maintaining order and civilizing the “natives.” Colonial

policies were designed to make colonized economies dependent on imperial power. Indigenous industries were undermined, and economic practices were redirected to serve the interests of the empire. In summary, the British Empire used dehumanization as a central tool to justify and maintain its colonial domination, employing a combination of pseudoscience, cultural imperialism, legal discrimination, propaganda, economic exploitation, and educational indoctrination to portray Indigenous peoples as inferior and to rationalize their subjugation and exploitation. All aspects of colonial domination, including natural resource extraction, cultural extraction, and the extraction of human bodies, were crucial for the British Empire to function. This exemplifies how the structures of the Empire enforce supremacy, in this case through the objectification and dehumanization accomplished by ascribing financial equivalents to humans. In this way the British Empire amassed wealth, both financially and culturally. As shown by Clement and Stockdale, many people contributed to both. The conflation of financial value with human life is especially visible in this colonial museological collection, illustrating the imperial duress at work within these systems.

This dehumanization of human remains was not just historic, but persists. A decade after this 1990 restitution, Bob Weatherall met with London's Natural History Museum in 2003. On this visit, according to fellow delegate and Ngarrindjeri Elder, Major Sumner, an altercation occurred at the Natural History Museum:

Towards the end of the discussion, the museum's head of collections, who had for some time been staring intently at Weatherall, leaned across and asked him if he would donate his remains when he died, "so we can research you." (Elliott 2010b: 4)

Here, it becomes evident that even amid the restitution process, the enduring presence of this anthropological mechanism of the dehumanization of human beings for research persists. This mechanism encapsulates a longstanding practice within anthropology

where cultural artifacts and remains are often decontextualized, commodified, and studied primarily for academic inquiry. Despite efforts to rectify historical injustices through repatriation, the underlying framework of objectification remains deeply entrenched.

4.8 Moves to Innocence

Given the identified moments of imperial duress and occlusions within this case study, next I will examine the moves to innocence which were a product of those occlusions. As discussed in Chapter Three, Tuck and Yang define moves to innocence as narrative shifts which deflect complicity in colonial settings. This focus is now on the actual historical narrative that is formed with the support of all the imperial duress and occlusions that have been identified. The move to innocence that occurred here is found in the manner by which this return was molded into a cautionary tale, as this return was represented as having an unsatisfactory outcome.

In 1990, the Pitt Rivers Museum completed their first restitution project with this return of six human remains to Australia. Representatives from the museum performed an official handover of the requested human remains, formally transferring the ownership of the subjects. The recipients had been deemed appropriate official representatives of the Australian High Commission and TAC. The involvement of the museum ended there; the returns were left to be coordinated by the Australian government who, as discussed, had formal procedures in place for returns. Although it initially appeared as a success, the legacy of this return later became the opposite.

In 1991, the painted skull from Stockdale that had been returned (1900.55.309) had traveled back to Australia on a different flight from the other five human remains. As

discussed, according to the archival documentation this skull had been collected on Melville Island on the Northern coast of Australia, though there is no information about how this collection location was determined. When the painted skull was returned it was sent to the mainland Tiwi Land Council Office in Darwin as this was the closest coastal town to Melville Island. The skull arrived at the Council Office in 1992 and caused an uproar. At a meeting following this return, the council voiced formal disapproval of this unexpected return and in correspondence, the Secretary for the Tiwi Land Council said the skull was “better off remaining where they were as they belonged to another age in another time.” (McGreevey 1998: 16).

Following this return, in May 1991 the Assistant Director of the New South Wales Land Council had contacted the Pitt Rivers Museum. He requested more information about the skulls so that source communities could be identified (McGreevey 1998). Clearly, they too had encountered the big black hole of information formed by occlusions and duress. However, there was no more information for the PRM to provide besides the sparse catalog entry. Again, there is no indication in the archive of how this Melville Island location was determined. The New South Wales Land Council had made attempts to do more research, but the PRM could not contribute to those efforts. It is my contention that this unsatisfactory outcome is precisely because of colonial occlusions—the lack of information caused by violent colonial collecting practices *ensured* that this return would be complex and would likely be presented as a failure because of that. Ultimately, the lack of information is the very cause of the “failed restitution.” Members of the Tiwi Land Council are reported to have said they prefer that returns only be facilitated if they had “a known name and relationship to the land so that a positive identification was possible” (McGreevey 1998: 22). However, this lack of information is precisely because the same occlusions were needed to form imperial narratives. By excluding humanizing

information in museological archives, it was easier to dehumanize colonized people in support of the goals of the British Empire. Moreover, it is a self-sustaining process, since this return has generated the narrative of consultation which simply reinscribes the power of the museum.

After this return, a narrative supporting consultation surrounding this return developed because of these events which occurred after the PRM formally relinquished ownership. The PRM response to the offense taken by the Tiwi Land Council determined that this situation had developed because the PRM had not consulted local communities before making this return. An internal document prepared by the PRM discusses this lasting effect on returns directly:

It appears that community consultation was not performed or not sufficiently performed prior to the return of several Australian Aboriginal human remains from the Museum in 1990. It is not clear exactly what consultation, if any, was undertaken at the time and we are keen to repeat the previous disastrous outcome where it appears that one relevant community was not consulted. (de Alarcón 2019; Appendix C)⁵

The time from request to handover had been extremely short and had not involved any discussion with recipients aside from their brief visit on March 14, 1990. Instead, the PRM had liaised mainly with TAC and the Australian government. It was decided that to avoid this unfortunate scenario and to prevent future offense, the museum would always do their own consultation with communities. Therefore the narrative learned from the museum's story of returns is about the importance of consultation. The 1998 Oxford masters dissertation by Zena McGreevey supported the idea that consultation must be done to avoid this situation from recurring. Her main conclusions building on this case study determined that for museological restitution "the importance of consultation could

⁵ There is likely a mistake made in this document, presumably the word "not" is missing. I have recorded the text as documented in the RDF files but I am quite sure that this is an error in typing.

not be overstated” (1998: 21). In my interviews with staff members for this research, there was a similar consensus regarding this case study. They said it was an unfortunate situation and a cautionary tale and members of museum staff told me in interviews that this event had a deep impact on the museum (O'Brien Backhouse 2021). They said that if the museum had been more diligent in personally and directly dealing with the communities that this could have been avoided. It became a lesson for how *not* to facilitate returns. The moral of the story became an emphasis on consultation with source communities. In discussions about this restitution, I was told multiple times that we always extensively consult now. The narrative formed out of this early return assumes that this result was due to the lack of museum control in consultation. Thus, this case study is often interpreted as a cautionary tale which deters museums from allowing source communities to make their own decisions about ownership. At the PRM, the story is upheld as a lesson that it should not have let Australian governmental organizations be in control of the final destinations of the Australian human remains.

This was the first return by the Pitt Rivers Museum and it had a critical impact upon the future policies of the museum. There was no policy at the time for returns and this incident led to the creation of one (Backhouse-O'Brien 2021). Now, the current “Policy On Human Remains Held By The University Of Oxford’s Museums” says in section 6.5 that “the University will not normally consider a claim from a national government unless it is made on behalf of an identified source community” which directly reflects the reluctance to have the same situation occur since this 1990 return (Oxford University Gazette 2006: 375). The current collections development policy also says in section 16.5 that consultation with “source communities” should occur (Collections Development Policy 2016: 13). Ultimately, the policy now deters engagement with national governments and prioritizes working directly with communities.

4.9 Consultation and Informants

The story of this return is positioned as instructive, supporting a narrative which enables the principle of consultation as paramount. Although museums do need to consult with communities, the museum states that it will not consider claims from national governments which do not have source community named, as per article 6.5 in the “Policy On Human Remains Held By The University Of Oxford’s Museums” which states that “the University will not normally consider a claim from a national government unless it is made on behalf of an identified source community” (Oxford University Gazette 2006: 375). This means that items cannot be returned without specific provenance information and that the identification of the source community must occur with input from the museum rather than being facilitated by a national government. Ultimately this ensures that the museum is the one doing the consultation and supports the idea that the museum should be the ultimate decision maker for who the materials belong to. This narrative recenters power to the museum and is reflected by the principles of anthropological theory in its use of informants.

Before the 1980s, numerous museums attempted to include marginalized communities in museums, often by merely hiring Indigenous individuals for roles such as performers or crafts demonstrators (Hill 2000, Simpson 2001). However, in the 1980s, museums began to shift towards inclusive strategies of museum practice. Museums began engaging in more meaningful consultations, involving Native advisors, advisory committees, and guest curators, and moving towards allowing subject peoples to speak for themselves. These practices countered the status quo of museums, which had before been dominated by colonial actors. This museological shift was generally positive and intended to include more diverse voices in museums.

Unfortunately, despite museums embracing these new collaborative practices, many of these consultation practices still recentered the museum. In “Speaking For or About Others? Evolving Ethnological Perspectives” Ann Lane Hedlund acknowledged the complexity of “voice” within museums, noting that the identification of non-Native authors was infrequent, and Indigenous involvement did not always equate to collaboration (1994). In this case, projects might engage Native consultants after museum agendas were already established, therefore limiting their contributions. Further, Ann McMullen’s article “The Currency of Consultation and Collaboration” from 2008 uses examples of her own experiences at the National Museum of the American Indian to discuss the dynamics of consultation and collaboration in museum settings. Her writing underscores the potential for consultation practices in museums to reinforce the museum’s authority. Despite efforts towards collaboration, McMullen observes that narratives of engagement with Indigenous communities often prioritize the outcomes of consultation rather than the collaborative process itself. Moreover, she suggests that these consultation initiatives often serve the museum’s public image and public relations objectives.

Using McMullen’s ideas helps illustrate how this story of the Australian return in 1990 was used to emphasize the primacy of museological consultation and further re-inscribed the authority and power of anthropology’s structures. This Australian case study is therefore a significant opportunity to examine these critical and complex topics in contemporary restitution discourse and how dominant narratives in the museum are used to reinforce ideas of the museum as an expert authority which wields almost indisputable power of decision making. This also reflects the assertion of Tuck and Yang that moves to innocence are “strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all” (Tuck and Yang 2012: 10). In this case, the narrative

accomplishes this by allowing the museum's position as an expert authority to be recentered. Though centering communities is a massive shift, it can still produce a narrative of consultation that has been shown to be problematic.

The power of the museum to determine legitimacy is retained through the narrative of consultation as it supports this common trope that anthropology occupies a unique space between colonized and colonizer and that it wields "expert knowledge" (Gough 1968). This expert knowledge lends authority to the museum, who assumes the responsibility to make the decision of who is the appropriate community to return materials to. I question the narrative that resulted from this case study and argue that it continues to push forward ideas of museums as the expert authority on the care of these materials. Given that this positioning of the museum perpetuates outdated museological ideas of expertise in the Global North and continues to situate the museum as more capable than local communities of making ownership decisions, this idea of expertise wielded by white institutions is at the heart of the challenge to returns. This justification is the crux of how museums refuse returns and is upheld by these narratives which position the museum as the expert authority.

More recently, this argument is reflected in the idea that museums must not enforce conditions upon restitutions such as conditions regarding display or use; these actions support the museum's retention of the ability to control and shape how materials are used, and by whom. These are all continuations of how the museum dictates the "proper" uses or "owners" of material culture. However, this case in particular also experiences its own unique power dynamics, as Australia is a settler colonial nation. The government relationship with local Indigenous communities is one of colonial power, so deferring to the Australian government as the experts is also problematic. McMullen's

article also underscores this issue, exploring how in museum consultations, individuals represent entire communities. This presents challenges, particularly in scenarios described by Clifford (1997), or by Hollowell (2005), where Indigenous advisors and consultants reject roles imposed by museums and their frameworks, highlighting disparities between community agendas and museum objectives. Therefore, the entire idea of an expert decision must be undermined.

This chapter concludes by returning to *The Essay on The Gift* in order to consider what type of exchange is occurring during the consultation practice. Borrowing from McMullen, it seems that what is being exchanged here is credibility and legitimacy: in exchange for space at the museum, “communities lend the authenticity of local knowledges and often their own voices to the museums” (2008: 64). In this sense, the museum can use the voices of source communities to “serve the museum’s image and public relations efforts” (McMullen 2008: 56). This is connected to the ways in which anthropological theory prizes the use of extraction of information from informants. This dominance of consultation has always been the core of anthropological theory. The policy of consultation required by the anthropological museum reflects the policy of consultation of anthropology itself.

Since the inception of the discipline, anthropological study has been a sort of extensive consultation. In the museum, the source community is also extensively consulted in the same way that the anthropologist interviews and extracts information. As discussed in Chapter Two, this core idea of consultation is the foundation of anthropological practice but plays into the idea of extraction and positions the anthropologist or anthropological museum as a middleman. Gough describes this positioning as giving anthropology a position as “white liberals between the conquerors and the colonized” (Gough 1968: 17),

wherein anthropologists are “of higher social status than their informants; they were usually of the dominant race, and they were protected by imperial law; yet, living closely with native peoples, they tended to take their part and to try to protect them against the worst forms of imperialist exploitation” (1968: 13). By positioning themselves as the expert authority, anthropological museums historically maintained control over the narratives surrounding artifacts in their collections, often relegating source communities to passive informants rather than active participants in the preservation and interpretation of their cultural heritage.

However, by reevaluating the role of consultation within anthropology and its implications for museum practices, there emerges an opportunity to redefine the dynamics of power and authority inherent in the process of artifact return. Instead of perpetuating a hierarchical relationship where museums dictate the terms of repatriation, there is a pressing need to adopt a more inclusive and collaborative approach that prioritizes the agency and perspectives of source communities. Instead, I want to re-situate this return and consider it as an example of how the museum must learn to release control. Here is an opportunity to reframe returns as a pivotal moment that underscores the necessity for museums to relinquish their historical dominance. Moving away from the anthropological theory and practice which prioritizes extractive use of informants, I suggest museums embrace an approach wherein the museum moves away from its position as expert authority.

4.10 Conclusions

In conclusion, the exploration of consultation and informants in this chapter illuminates the intricate power dynamics embedded within museum practices, particularly concerning restitution efforts. While museums have made strides towards inclusivity and

collaboration through consultation with source communities, the historical legacy of colonialism and the persistent centrality of museums as expert authorities continue to shape the discourse surrounding artifact return. Despite the shift towards more collaborative consultation practices, many initiatives still prioritize the museum's interests and objectives, reinforcing its position of authority. This concluding section underscores the need for museums to relinquish control and challenge the hegemony of museum authority.

Despite many attempts to contact museums in Australia, I was unsuccessful in making contact with anyone who could help me to determine the exact fate of the human remains that were returned. I am not able to report on where these six human remains are now. The archive alone cannot help produce a conclusion which can report on the final destinations of these returns. As discussed, this case is considered a “bad example” of a return. However, it is also useful as an example of a return which placed no conditions on the claim for return, and is a case that can tell multiple stories. Ultimately, this case study uses colonial archives to tell a different story about colonial domination. By scrutinizing power structures and identifying occlusions, duress, and moves to innocence, this research disrupts the imperial silencing inherent in historical narratives. This chapter concludes that the absence of provenance information poses a significant challenge to restitution processes, hindering efforts towards rehumanization, distancing museums from their colonial legacies, and reinforcing their authority as expert arbiters. The main contribution of this case study is to identify a typology of redactions and demonstrate how returns are limited by the lack of information, which is a product of its own design. Finally, this chapter offers insights into the problematic nature of the emphasis on consultation and informants in anthropological theory and museums.

Chapter 5: The Hawaiian Return

In the first case study, a typology of redactions was identified; this second case study looks at how those categories of occlusion are mobilized. The main contribution of this chapter is therefore in the unveiling of how redactions can be used to prevent returns. This chapter demonstrates how both archival gaps can prevent returns as well as how anthropological theory is negatively mobilized during returns. However, this chapter is also optimistic, offering insights into how anthropological theory can be reoriented to deepen our understanding of the process of returns.

This second case study explores a “live” claim from the Office of Hawaiian Affairs for multiple separate materials from the Pitt Rivers Museum, including both human remains and cultural materials. The following sections first identify the subjects requested for return in this case study then consider how the positionings of anthropological theory both help and hinder how museums conceptualize object and subject in collections, cutting the network in returns, and relationships between institution and community. The final sections consider how occlusions are mobilized to prevent returns and how conceptualizations of the gift can both facilitate and impede returns, before asking questions about why such concrete information is required from a fragmented archive, before finally problematizing the anthropological narrative of salvage anthropology.

Similarly to the previous case study, in this chapter I have tried to continue to employ the current anthropological voice by tracing names and facts and dates and dimensions; however, it became clear that this voice was less effective as the amount of information available decreased. The precise academic tone began to falter as this chapter grappled with unknowns. In the last chapter, archival gaps could be academically addressed.

However, in this chapter, the occlusions were not simply in the archive. Instead, this chapter was forced to confront a form of self-censorship. In this sense, this chapter is about transparency and the realities of institutional research. Here, the anthropological voice is not sufficient and this writing struggles with how to confront missing information, especially self-censorship.

This self-censorship is due to a number of factors. Primarily, as this request for return is still in progress, many files and pieces of information are not available to be shared in publication at the time of this writing. This was made clear to me on a Monday in January 2023, when I emailed the collections department at the Pitt Rivers Museum to ask to see some of the files we had related to our collections. As described in the methods chapter, the process for requesting access to documents at the PRM is quite straightforward. A researcher can email and request a physical visit to the museum where a member of the PRM staff would provide the documents requested. I sent an email to the PRM with the accession numbers of the materials I was interested in, and requested to view any files we had on them. I sent out a few emails on the same day to multiple archives in Oxford and then made a cup of spearmint tea. By the time I returned to my computer, I had a response. However, the response was unexpected—I was pointed to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for further discussion.

This was rare, as normally these requests are not required to be verified for approval. As an early career researcher, I got a little nervous. I dutifully typed out the same access request and sent it to [REDACTED] instead. Less than a minute after pressing send I received a response that made my heart flutter even more. It was just one sentence: “Are you available for a really quick chat on the phone?”

I wasn't, because I had a commitment to my part-time job as a rowing coach. So we arranged for an in-person meeting the next day. Had I done something wrong? None of my previous access requests had ever required approval from [REDACTED]. As discussed, normally this process entails a straightforward visit. The next day, [REDACTED] and I had a meeting during our lunch breaks. I was first asked questions about how I had known that the materials were subject to a restitution request. I stuttered a little bit, but explained that they are available online. They explained that because the requests were in progress, I wouldn't be allowed access to the majority of the documents. I wasn't aware if this was standard policy or not. I was then asked why I wanted this information and what I planned to do with it. In answer, I explained that my research was looking at challenges and opportunities for restitution and that I was looking at PRM returns exclusively. This seemed to satisfy. They smiled and said I might be able to see the Related Document Files, but nothing else. They suggested that I look into other returns which the PRM had facilitated, but I replied that my heart was set on using a current return request as my case study. They acquiesced, but I was asked to not use the accession numbers in my dissertation. They seemed confused as to how I could have determined that these materials had been requested for restitution at all.

I left the meeting feeling a bit shaken. Of course all of this information is within public access and is therefore not confidential, but I was still discouraged from sharing it. Was I doing something wrong? Why did I feel like I had stuck my nose into somewhere I wasn't supposed to? Would this torpedo my doctoral work? [REDACTED] was extremely kind and was simply following the institutional process, but the outcome of the institutional process meant that I left the meeting with less access to information than when I started. Most academic interviews are supposed to supply a researcher with data, but mine only seemed to tell me what I wasn't allowed to write about. I think back

now to Sara Ahmed's writing and to her idea of how institutions create blockages. Was this a roadblock? Was this awful feeling in the bottom of my stomach actually part of the duress that I was seeking to identify? Of course, my supervisor's response was not the same deflated reaction as mine: "Well surely write about *that*," he said.

As such, and as the result of conversations with the institution, I have mostly used information that is available publicly, unless specified otherwise. This is a form of self-censorship, but the outcome is that this written work mirrors the restricted access to information experienced by communities who are seeking to make requests for returns. This amount of access to information (mostly available online) is likely a comparable amount of information to what communities are able to use to mobilize for their requests, as it is often information from online museum catalogues and newspaper articles and maybe academic articles. Of course, I only have access to many of those sources as I am a member of Oxford University. However, as discussed in the methods chapter, the lockdowns of 2020 changed the way this research was conducted and this work has a specific aim to be critical of the information that is publicly available. As there is a high-level of information that is expected in order to make a successful request to institutions, I am seeking this information to broaden our understanding of how these informational black holes affect returns; the goal is to identify dispossession and attempt to use anthropological theory to understand it.

5.1 Identification

Given that this research is meant to identify and understand where and how gaps in information and occlusions affect returns, then this work must first establish what information *is* made available. The PRM website mentions this claim for return on their "Committed to Change" web page, saying "Current pending official claim in process:

2020 - Hawaii (cultural objects)". However, as the return is live and information is confidential, I had to work only with the knowledge that there is a drum and a wicker head that have been requested. I was a bit worried about finding more information for this case study, as "the Pitt Rivers has 208 objects from the Hawaiian Islands and countless more created in other Polynesian island groups" (Coutu n.d.: 1). I could not determine if there are more materials in the request besides the drum and wicker head. However, knowing that there was a drum and a figure of a head in the museum is often more information than most communities get and was extremely helpful. I also knew that the collection and taking of these items had been related to the voyage of the *HMS Blonde*. Thus, my research first turned to the expedition journals of the *HMS Blonde* to look for any recordings of a drum and a wicker head.

As both materials were harvested during the expedition of the *Blonde*, I first turned to the primary documentation of the acquisition in the field. There are at least four primary sources to use here: firstly, the official account of the *HMS Blonde* is formally attributed to Byron, but may also be authored by ghost writer Maria Graham (Kaeppeler 1978). This official account which is commonly and perhaps mistakenly attributed to Byron is known to be an edited compilation of accounts (Jessop 1999). Next, there are also three individual accounts of the expedition from Robert Dampier, James Macrae, and Andrew Bloxam. Unfortunately, the information available in these multiple accounts does not explicitly highlight exactly how the wicker head at the PRM was taken from Hawaii, but the provenance of the drum is discussed.

To start, the drum was easy to find in the travel journals. Bloxam's account of the *HMS Blonde* tells us that three drums were taken from *Hale o Keawe*. *Hale o Keawe* is on the West coast of the island of Hawai'i, in what is now Pu'uuhonua o Hōnaunau National

Historical Park. According to the National Park Service, *Hale o Keawe* is the only representation of a traditional consecrated house (hale poki) on the island. In the century that the *HMS Blonde* visited, it would have served as a royal mausoleum, housing the remains of 23 deified high chiefs (ali'i). These bones have now all been removed, along with what Bloxam describes as one “English” drum and two “native” drums (Bloxam 1925: 75). One of these “native” drums is likely to be the drum currently housed in the PRM whose return has been requested.



Image E: 1954.4.3 available on the online collections database at <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/collections-online#/item/prm-object-38248>

A cursory search of the PRM online collections shows that Byron kept at least one of these drums, which eventually made its way to the PRM. I have been asked not to share any specifics or accession numbers in this research, but this information is easily found online. This dissertation must self-censor, but there is still enough information to tell the story of acquisition: the drum (Image E above) was taken during the expedition of the *HMS Blonde*, under the command of George Anson Byron, the cousin of the famous poet. The *HMS Blonde* departed England in 1824 for Hawaii to return the bodies of the deceased King Kamehameha II and Queen Kamāmalu, who had died en route to visit King George. Nine months later, the *HMS Blonde* arrived in Hawaii and stayed for the

state funeral. That July in 1825, the *HMS Blonde* visited the site of Captain Cook's death and erected a monument to him and then subsequently visited the royal tomb *Hale o Keawe* at Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau, which they then robbed. During this grave-robbing on July 15, 1825, materials such as two *pahu hula* (drums) were stolen. Andrew Bloxam documented this theft, illustrating the "two native drums" in his diary (Bloxam 1925: 75–76). Byron later donated many items, including one of these drums, to the Royal United Service Institution (RUSI). It was then purchased from RUSI in October 1929 by Harry Beasley of the Cranmore Museum. In 1954, the PRM annual report noted that they had received a generous donation from the Beasley family. This report notes that a member of the PRM staff, Beatrice Blackwood, traveled down to London and selected items from the Beasley collection which were then donated to the PRM. The drum was among this group of donated materials (1954-1955 Annual Report). Since this traditional drum was taken from the royal tombs, it has been in three British museums over the past two centuries. The *pahu hula* drum had remained in Beasley's London museum for 28 years, before being donated to the PRM in Oxford. The provenance for the drum is clear, with the documentation of the taking provided by Bloxam's journals and even including illustrations for comparison. The transfers between the English museums are also well recorded. In fact, the majority of this drum's history as recorded in the archive is about its guardianship in British museums.

The other material requested for return in this case study is an *akua hulu manu*. *Akua hulu manu* are feather gods, often made of wicker vine, woven net, feathers, pearl shell, teeth, hair, and wood. According to Teresa Wilkins' descriptions of the role of these images in ancient Hawaii, the primary roles of the *akua hulu manu* were as protector and guide for the deceased in burial, as a vehicle of communication, and as a protective and aggressive force within ancient Hawaiian warfare (2008: 4). These images were sacred,

possessing all the power of a god, and were cared for by a specific person who would be known as *kahu*. There are supposedly just nineteen surviving examples of this type of wicker head in museums around the world (Wilkins 2008).

Finding mentions of this *akua hulu manu* in the expedition journals is more difficult, and will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter. However, a search for anything in the collections that is associated with the *HMS Blonde* revealed the likely subject of the return request. I have been asked not to include the identifying numbers for the drum and the wicker head, but again the Pitt Rivers database is easily searched and a source community can access these online records without any need for specific credentials. Regarding the collection of the wicker head, the provenance is not so clear. The wicker head at the PRM was either taken from *Hale o Keawe* alongside the drum, or was acquired through exchange or as a gift on the same expedition. This work cannot make a definitive conclusion regarding which specific manner the PRM subject was harvested, but the elusive provenance history of this wicker head will be a main subject of the inquiry of this case study and will be discussed in greater depth in the following sections.

After identifying the materials that were requested, I moved to identifying the occlusions in the keeping. Generally, the occlusions found in the archive included indiscrepancies that were similar to those documented in the first case study. For example, the online collections information for the *akua hulu manu* says that it was “transferred from the Ashmolean Museum to the Pitt Rivers Museum on 28 November 1885” (“1886.1.1448” Related Document Files). However, on the same page, the catalogue also says that it was transferred 28 September 1885. These dates are a month apart and could be a typographical error or a function of the process of the transfers, but Stoler reminds us that even these benign mislabelings are part of how occlusive structures function to hide

the shaping forces of empire (Stoler 2016). Because of these discrepancies, researchers might spend valuable hours attempting to verify these exact dates. As such, attention should be paid to the way that these small inconsistencies may have larger reverberations. These occlusions in the archive have implications which will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter.

Despite the elusive provenance of the wicker head, there was more information about the collecting history than I expected. In a similar manner to the drum, there was much information available in the archive documenting the transfers of the drum between museums and the *HMS Blonde*'s expedition; however, the information needed to identify exactly how the wicker head was collected was still occluded. It seemed that the occlusions I was attempting to identify for this case study were buried in the amount of information I had. Given that there are four published travel diaries which documented the manner in which the *HMS Blonde* voyage collected Pacific material culture, there are therefore multiple detailed accounts. Despite their dubious or collaborative authorship, these documents are helpful primary sources for provenance research. Alongside these primary documents, there was also scholarly research into the provenance histories of these specific subjects and generally more information for these two materials than in most restitution cases. Yet still, the specific information about the collection of the wicker head was elusive. Summarily, there is a wealth of documentation available but some very key information was missing. Returning to Millar's repurposed categories of provenance, it's clear that the custodial history and the story of the keeping and transfers between museums is rich, especially when compared to the sparse and occluded story of taking. These occlusions are archival, but are distributed unevenly, as the data in this case study shows minimal information about the actual taking, but comparatively rich detail of the custodial history.

5.2 Objects and Subjects

The archival occlusions in this case fit into the typology identified in the first case study, as they either dehumanize, or distance the subjects from the violence of colonialism.

This first type of dehumanizing occlusion will be discussed in this section. As I attempted to identify occlusions, it became apparent that many of the occlusions in this case are not just archival, but occur as a product of how anthropological theory influences museum practice. In this sense, the following three sections explore how the broader anthropological milieu influences how museums function. This next section specifically investigates how the museum dehumanizes with categories using definitional violence, and how the anthropological divisions between human/non-human/modified/exposed remains have generally occluded ways of being. As such, I am looking at how the first category of occlusions are mobilized to perform dehumanization, resulting in the occlusion of humanity. In this sense, the violence which stems from these classifications is what Adam Netzer Zimmer (2017) calls definitional violence—an act of categorization which produces dehumanizing violence.

Keeping subjects in the museum means that they will be categorized, and this museological categorization can dehumanize the subjects that have now become mere objects in collections. This issue became visible because the wicker head in this case study is made of human hair and tooth. It is human remains, but there is a tension in the classification made by the museum. In this case, the museum does not consider the wicker head to be human remains and instead classifies it as a cultural object. Thus, dehumanization occurs in the categorization of this subject as an object. This work originally intended to study solely human remains; however, it became apparent that this distinction between human remains and material was unproductive and unhelpful for returns. In this case, we consider both a drum and a constructed wicker head with

human hair (classed by the museum as modified human remains). However, these delineations between object and subject are not so concrete for many of the source communities that museums work with during returns. Thus, this Eurocentric boundary between human and non-human will be scrutinized.

Beyond the dehumanization of actual human remains in museum collections, the museum often holds materials which may be considered as persons, beings, power objects, or spirits in their source communities but are considered cultural materials by the museum and most of their visitors. This phenomenon of categorizing subjects in museum collections as “objects” can manifest in many ways. For example, the PRM considers the following as objects:

- Malangan carvings from Papua New Guinea (1899.62.401.1; 1899.62.404; 1884.62.17; 1899.62.402; 1899.62.403; 1899.62.401.2) that are currently on display and are the recently deceased of the Nalik community. The carvings undergo a process by which they become the ancestor and then the decay or burning of that ancestor releases them into the world again. Of Malangan, Strathern writes that “we may imagine them as bodies” (Stathern 2005c: 93).
- the Nkisi on display at the PRM (1900.39.70) which contains a spirit named Mavungu
- Blackfoot shirts (1893.67.1 through to 1893.67.5) which are a “living presence” and “which still house the spirit of the ancestors who wore them” (Peers 2015: summary)

In these examples, subjects are placed into a class of objects in a museum's collections. This museological phenomenon of objectification has been discussed before by Rubio, who calls the museum an "objectification machine that endeavors to transform and to stabilize artworks as meaningful 'objects' that can be exhibited, classified, and circulated" (Rubio 2014: 620). Given this understanding of how museums objectify, this case study next explores the applications of anthropological divides between person and object through the wicker head with human hair. Specifically, how the category of human remains for a museum has the potential to exclude and classify subjects as an object on the grounds of it being "modified" human remains.

As I argued in Chapter Two, these distinctions and categories of human are taken from theory and imposed upon museological subjects with very real consequences. Domínguez Rubio discusses how some artworks defy traditional preservation methods due to their ephemeral, interactive, or unstable nature in "Preserving the Unpreservable: Docile and Unruly Objects at MoMA" where he explores the complex nature of preserving contemporary artworks in museums, particularly focusing on the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). He suggests that museums like MoMA are challenged with finding innovative ways to preserve and present these "unruly" objects while maintaining their integrity and meaning. Basically, when collections don't fit into these categories cause issues for museums. Virginia Dominguez presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in 1988, saying of these museological categorizations that "our own processes of objectification provide us not just with the objects but also with the categories by which we may see some things and not others as objects" (Dominguez, 1988). In this way, anthropological theory itself has the potential to occlude the humanity of these deceased human beings and categorization can be a matter of life or death. The outcome of these categorical boundaries between human,

non-human, or modified human is the same as our first typological category, wherein the structures occlude humanity and dehumanize, but it is not through occlusions of information and rather an occlusion of humanity using definitional violence.

This distinction becomes quite important because in policy, this means subjects could be treated differently. The PRM follows a wider Oxford policy for restitution that states that all human remains are to be treated the same and their definition of human remains includes “modified” human remains. The Pitt Rivers Museum and all Oxford museums follow a definition of human remains which precisely addresses this issue in section 2.2 where it states:

2.2 Human remains also include any of the above that may have been modified in some way by human skill/or may be physically bound up with other non-human materials to form an artefact composed of several materials. Another but much smaller category of materials included in this definition is that of art works composed of bodily fluids and soft tissue. (Oxford University Gazette 2006: 374).

However, the same policy also contains a warning that modified human remains may be subject to different rules regarding returns specifically when it states:

6.3 The University of Oxford regards objects made from human remains that have been modified for a secondary purpose (e.g. made into a musical instrument) or are ‘separable’ (e.g. made from hair or nails) as falling into a different category from human remains that were intended for burial, and so is unlikely to agree to any claim for their repatriation. (Oxford University Gazette 2006: 375).

In this sense, these categorical boundaries can influence whether returns are successful or if they are denied. This distinction between modified and unmodified human remains seems especially unfounded when all museological human remains have been modified to a certain extent by the mere act of preservation. Despite this, anthropological theory enforces a boundary that can be used for the redaction of humanity. This distinction also applies to the display policy at the museum. At the PRM, human remains have not been

displayed since 2020 following an Internal Review of Displays and Programming from an Ethical Perspective from 2017–2020. In June of that year, over 120 human remains were removed from display. This included the shrunken heads, or *tsantsas*, which were originally made by the Shuar and Achuar people from the rainforests of Ecuador and Peru, as well as the South Asian Naga trophy heads and an Egyptian mummy of a child. Further, decorated skulls, scalps, Egyptian mummies, and other human remains from India, Tibet, Malaysia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Ecuador and the Solomon Islands were also removed from display (Batty 2020).

However, modified human remains are still displayed. Therefore, the distinction between human remains and modified human remains is not enacted for returns, but can be for other uses like display. Here we can look again to Sara Ahmed for analytic guidance: policies can create evidence of action, without action (Ahmed 2021: 50). In a similar case at the Penn Museum, a recent policy change has announced that no “exposed” human remains will be displayed (Human Remains Policy 2023). This means that if hair or teeth are visible, it will not be displayed. However, it also means that human remains which are covered, for example if they are mummified, then their display will continue. These anthropological definitions can therefore have very material outcomes. Ultimately, the act of placing so much importance on a definable humanity allows for a deliberate exclusion of humanity.

The wicker head therefore illustrates the tensions in this type of definitional violence, as does the drum in this same request. Drums are often considered to have a voice of their own, attaining a sort of being-ness which mere objects do not have. This specific drum incorporates animal remains as well, with Shark Skin Fish. I am not saying that the people requesting the return of the drum hold this drum as a being, but I am saying that

the lines that are drawn to separate out these boundaries are not held universally and that the categories are unproductive and unhelpful for returns. Ultimately, the boundaries of subject and object in anthropological theory are not useful for returns. Here, humanity is occluded by the categorical boundaries and definitional violence of anthropological theory.

In an attempt to confront this boundary, you might have already noticed that this work attempts to deliberately blur these lines between object and subject, and has made a point to refer to these museological collections as “subjects” and not as “objects.” As such, this work has a broad framing of considering human remains and easily encompasses other materials which are largely considered to have personhood. In this sense, changes to the anthropological voice are already needed. The anthropological tradition in which this voice exists requires alterations to the actual language used to discuss these themes.

5.3 Cutting and Severance

This next section also considers how anthropological theory negatively influences our understandings of returns, but also optimistically argues that in this case certain elements of anthropological theory can instead further understandings of the nuanced dynamics of returns rather than obstruct them. More precisely, Marilyn Strathern’s work on cutting the network can deepen our comprehension of the dynamics occurring in both the collection and return processes. As discussed in the previous section, anthropology can make subjects into objects. Anthropology has struggled with this insubstantial boundary for years: Bruno Latour wrote that “there is a feeling that researchers interested in material culture are entering a brave new world, where subjectivity and objectivity are collapsing into each other, and scholars are left wondering just how to go

about making objects ‘spokespersons’ and how to give things room enough to ‘object’ to what we say about them” (Latour 2000: 115).

However, anthropology can also make objects into subjects. To address this divide between subject and object, anthropology responded by endowing agency unto objects. In this case, anthropology adopted the traditional functionalist approach of LSE economic anthropology with actor–network theory (ANT) which emerged from 1980s Schools of Management and suggested a kind of ultra-materialistic and symmetrical approach to treating people and objects as if they were entirely commensurable agents. Developed by French sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour, it is a theoretical framework that seeks to understand social phenomena by emphasizing the agency and interconnectedness of both human and non-human entities. In *Reassembling the Social* from 2005, Latour proposed that all entities, whether human or non-human, have the capacity to act and influence social outcomes. ANT considers actors as heterogeneous elements, forming networks of relationships that shape the dynamics of social life. In ANT, the term “actor” refers not only to individuals but also to non-human entities, such as technologies, institutions, and objects, all of which contribute to the construction of social reality. Latour emphasizes the importance of tracing the associations and interactions between actors to comprehend the complex web of relationships that constitute social phenomena. This approach attempted to map relations in a universal way. ANT was used at the PRM by Larson, Petch, and Zeitlyn in 2007, to conceptualize the “networks of connection” at the museum through the creation of network diagrams and to aid in the “analysis of the relationships between curators, collectors and objects during the early history of the Pitt Rivers Museum” (2007: 212).

However, by placing equal importance and agency in all directions, power dynamics became invisible. This limitation was acknowledged by Larson, Petch, and Zeitlyn, who noted that “the diagrams we have produced are based on the methodological assumption that all the connections are of equal import. This is, of course, far from true, because some people may have collaborated intensely during their collecting work for the museum, while others were merely acquaintances” (2007: 236). In museums, this strategy suffers from its flat ontology, firstly because it obscures agency, and secondly because it makes power dynamics invisible, actions which Tuck and Yang would identify as a move to innocence. Latour presented ANT as an attempt to overcome the separation of subject and object. Yet, this strategy flattened agency and materials. In a similar naturalization process, these power dynamics are hidden in order for all relations to appear “normal.” Strathern criticized ANT for this lack of acknowledgement of hierarchy and power dynamics, noting that Latour’s symmetrical vision brings together human and non-human into a single social ordering, saying:

A network is an apt image for describing the way one can link or enumerate disparate entities without making assumptions about level or hierarchy. Points in a narrative can be of any material or form, and network seems a neutral phrase for interconnectedness. (Strathern 1996: 522)

Using ANT therefore is a challenge for identifying the unequal power dynamics inherent in returns. Alfred Gell, a British anthropologist, engaged critically with actor–network theory in his work *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (1998). While not directly rejecting ANT, Gell offered a nuanced perspective and extended his own theories on the agency of objects, focusing specifically on art. Gell’s nuancing of ANT enlivened anthropology, allowing for a space wherein objects themselves were not agential, but were conduits or “indices” of the artist’s will (1998). In contrast to the emphasis on the agency of networks in ANT, Gell argued that certain objects, particularly artworks, possess a special kind of agency that influences human behavior. Gell proposed that art

objects have the ability to act as agents by exerting a form of influence on individuals. He developed the idea of the “art nexus,” a network of social relationships mediated by art objects that shape and direct human action. While Gell acknowledged the importance of networks and associations in social life, he offered a more specific and nuanced understanding of the agency of objects, particularly in the realm of art. Gell’s work and ANT share common ground in their recognition of the active role of non-human entities, yet Gell’s focus on the distinctive agency of art objects reflects his attempt to offer a more targeted and art-specific framework within the broader anthropological discourse.

Most importantly, ANT is less helpful for returns because there is a key form of disconnection which occurs in collecting and returns processes that must be addressed. For example, once a subject is in a museum, many communities often say that the subject becomes an object and it is cut from its use. In the previous chapter, the first case study explored how the source community in Australia stated that the returned skull was “better off remaining where they were as they belonged to another age in another time” (McGreevey 1998: 16). This quote from the Tiwi secretary indicates that the museological process has somehow severed the subject from the community.

Though this cutting away from use occurs in the process of museological collecting, this type of severance can occur in other ways also. For example, at the PRM there are subjects which should not be in a museum according to the Maasai people. For the Maasai, there were five subjects in particular whose mere presence in the museum was disrespectful. In 2018, a Maasai representative who was involved in the requests named Samwel Nangiria suggested a ceremony to sever the subjects in question so that they could be in the museum without causing harm. In a quote from *The Guardian* in an article by Yohann Koshy from December 4 2018, Nangiria suggests: “inviting elders to

perform a spiritual ceremony that will ‘disconnect’ the objects from their cultural function, allowing the Maasai to actively donate them to the museum” (Koshy 2018). Whether this has occurred is unclear, but clearly there is a phenomenon of uncoupling that can occur for subjects in museums. These situations involve a type of cutting.

This phenomenon is well known within museological theory. The idea of museum objects being stopped in their use is common (Weil 1997a), and the process of becoming part of a museum collection is capable of executing this special intercision. Becoming part of a museum collection results in a stoppage of use in their original contexts, and also eventually even their use within the museum diminished. Larson writes of how museological collections are less used in recent years, saying: “During the course of the 20th century, interacting with objects in this way has become an increasingly privileged occupation for curators and conservators. However, actually using the objects in collections is less common today” (2007: 109). In many ways, the museum thus has a power to make things into objects or to cut away their use. However, despite our many theories of anthropological entanglement, we do not often discuss this type of disentanglement yet.

Therefore, I turn to a more prescriptive approach. Again, I follow Stephen Jay Gould’s argument that knowledge advances primarily by replacement, and not addition (1981: 352). Therefore a key contribution of this dissertation is to optimistically suggest that anthropological theory can already offer us better ways of understanding restitution. Here we can look to anthropology to consider human remains in museums by using concepts of cutting and severance. Specifically, in the tradition of anthropological relations, Strathern posited that social relationships and networks can have finite length and be cut. In “Cutting the Network” (1996), Strathern explores how individuals navigate

intricate networks of social connections, particularly through acts of reciprocity and exchange. Strathern responds to Latour's proposed networks in actor-network theory, and notes that these vast entanglements of relations can be cut. Strathern argues that these networks are not fixed or hierarchical, but rather fluid and constantly negotiated through various social practices. Strathern introduces the concept of "cutting" as a symbolic act that temporarily disrupts or reconfigures social ties, allowing individuals to renegotiate their positions within the network. She uses Derrida's definitions of cutting, defining cutting as "the way one phenomenon stops the flow of others" (Strathern 1996: 522). In her work she uses the example of a patent application; despite the contributions of the people who are part of Latour's network of that patent, she argues that the patent cuts the network by defining a bounded and fixed network, saying that "the force of 'law' cuts into a limitless expanse of 'justice', reducing it and rendering it expressible" (Strathern 1996: 522).

I extend this idea of severance to material culture and posit that this theory can be applied to consider restitution: what if the collection process is seen as a form of cutting the network, wherein the violent acquisition removes the subject from its network? In this sense, power dynamics of museological collecting can be more deeply considered, as the idea of disentanglement can be applied. Strathern herself alludes to this possible phenomena, saying that "in their collecting it is past anthropologists who have cut up cultures into the bits reassembled in their narratives" (Strathern 1992: 58). A few years later, Strathern clarifies that one of the best mechanisms of cutting is Euro-American ownership:

Ownership is powerful because of its double effect, as simultaneously a matter of belonging and of property. Euro-Americans will not have to look far in order to determine network length; they have always known that belonging divides and property disowns. (Strathern 1991: 531)

In this sense, museological ownership facilitates a type of severance. In Philip Pullman's fictional series *His Dark Materials*, he discusses a machine meant for cutting. In this universe, humans are connected to a spirit manifest outside themselves called a *daemon*, and share feelings and pain. However, this connection can be severed with a special "intercision" machine which uses a silver guillotine to physically cut the bond. Once the machine has severed the connection between a human and their animal daemon, the two ex-partners are in a living death. The body physically functions, but the connection is gone. This idea applies to museums, who are capable of cutting this connection between two things with the glass of a display case.

Applied to returns, Strathern's theory can provide useful insights into the function of museological cutting, wherein the materials are cut from their contexts, and then used to create a storyboard on the anthropological cutting room floor. In this sense, using Strathern to understand how subjects and objects experience cutting and severance might therefore be more useful than Latour's ANT or Thomas' ideas of entanglement for considering museological collection and subsequent returns. As such, there is already extant anthropological theory that can be applied to deepen our understanding of dispossession. These two sections have focused on how occlusions stemming from anthropological theory can dehumanize; however, it has also suggested a way to see those occlusions by aligning with anthropological theory in a new way. By reorienting anthropological theory using classic theories from Strathern, we see that anthropology provides an opportunity to more deeply understand dispossession and returns. In this sense, these sections have attempted to identify occlusions in the process of museological collection but also opportunities for a deeper understanding of the process of museological keeping.

5.4 Project Versus Process

The previous two sections explored how anthropological positionings can both help and hinder understandings of museological dispossession. This next section similarly attempts to consider how anthropological frameworks affect praxis by exploring the contextual framework of relationships in museums. In this section, I explore how the anthropological emphasis on relationships supports museological “process,” which can be circular, in comparison to completable projects. Here I argue that the anthropological emphasis on relationships in museum practice is unhelpful for returns and instead suggest using the work of Sara Ahmed to consider how these institutional relationships function.

Evidence for the existence of returns as a process rather than a project is evident in the timelines of returns that are established by institutions. For example, the Pitt Rivers Museum website indicates that there is a current on-going restitution claim, saying: “Current pending official claim in process: 2020 - Hawaii (cultural objects)” (Committed to Change n.d.). This webpage on the PRM website references this particular case study wherein a drum and wicker head were requested for return. However, the request for this return actually began in 2015, according to a PRM podcast (Gomes 2020). Further, discussions between the museum and academic researchers in the RDF files about requests from the Office of Hawaiian affairs for return of the Hawaiian materials date back to 2016. It seems that conversations have likely been occurring for many years, despite the date of 2020 given on the PRM website.

In this sense, we see evidence of a process of returning rather than a project to facilitate a return. It is possible that this muddled timeline is due to the existence of multiple or unsuccessful claims. The timeline might be explained if a first request from 2015 was

denied, and that a second modified request was initiated in 2020. However, by presenting the request for return as more recent than it actually is, the institution supports a phenomenon that was discussed in Chapter Two; museums can present returns as a new process rather than a process with a history. By presenting returns as a new phenomenon, or as something that *has not* been done, it can be inferred that returns therefore *should not* be done. A version of this same phenomenon can occur if the museum presents the return as recent when in fact it is half a decade older than presented. While these dates may be technically correct, if the dates publicized are in fact the start dates of a secondary amended request, the technicality matters less in public perception. For the public, the earlier dates are occluded and encourage the perception that the current request has only been in process for four years, rather than eight years.

Ahmed wrote that “if an inconvenient history can be erased by the failure to keep records properly, the failure to keep records properly is convenient” (Ahmed 2021: 93).

Borrowing from her work on institutional handling of sexual assault complaints might explain this phenomenon seen here, wherein records of the earlier requests are not kept in order to occlude the story of multiple requests. However, whatever the reason for this protracted timeline and its discrepancies at the PRM, what does it mean more generally for source communities to be forced to make multiple claims? At the British Museum, of the eight claims listed on their website, four of them are repeat requests. This means that half of their requests are made by the same people asking for the same things. This problem aligns again with the work of Sara Ahmed and might be seen as a form of institutional blocking. Applying Ahmed, we might see returns act similarly to circular complaints that are full of detours and blockages.

Regardless of occluded dates, it is clear that requests take years. Despite the quick response and return of the museum in the first case study, it is extremely uncommon for a return to occur in fewer than three months from request to return. In fact, the longer protracted timelines described by Ahmed are more common. Putting aside the fact that this request for return may have started as early as 2015, the PRM website says this request began in 2020. This means that at the time of writing, this return has still been ongoing for four years and has still not been completed. This is not an uncommonly long timeline for museums, as in another request for return the PRM states that “In May 2017, 10 ancestral remains were returned to Aotearoa. The initial request was made in 2015 but conversations started in 1999” (“Critical Changes” n.d). For this 2017 return, the same phenomena noted above has occurred, wherein the museum can make a request appear to have occurred within a reasonable amount of time (for example, over three years from 2015–2017 as above). However, more importantly “conversations” about this return had been occurring since 1999, meaning that the request actually took about 18 years instead of three. These processes take years, if not decades. With Ahmed’s work on how protracted timelines work against “complainers,” we might also go back and reconsider our own timelines discussed in this section. Borrowing from Ahmed therefore provides a useful framework to consider a complaint which takes multiple decades to be resolved and is not well documented, providing an understanding of how institutions function.

These same phenomena have been noted in archival studies. For example, Carolyn Steedman’s archival dust identifies similar experiences “about circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone” (2001: 164). These ideas of circularity and things missing are easily mapped onto the process of returns. I argue that these circular processes are often encouraged by museum practice, as it is

focused on relationships. As discussed in Chapter Two, both anthropology and the anthropological museum place heavy emphasis on what Deleuze calls “the master concept of anthropology—relation” (Deleuze 2009: 170). According to Gell, if “anthropology has a specific subject matter at all, that subject matter is ‘social relationships’” (Gell 1998: 4). This relational focus takes many forms: “relation is at once one of anthropology’s central tools of inquiry and a prime target of anthropological knowledge, while at the same time its theoretical invention as a scaffolding device precipitates is discovery as something that seemingly slips out from under explicit theorizing” (Strathern 2020: 2). This emphasis on relations is expressed in Oxford’s museum projects such as the *Relational Museum* project from 2002–2006, or the *Rethinking Relationships and Building Trust around African Collections*, which began in 2019.

At the PRM specifically, the emphasis is on creating a relationship between source community and museum. At the PRM, the institutional website states that “Community partnerships are central to the participatory approach of the Museum” (Community Partnerships n.d.). This is in line with the outcome seen in the first case study, wherein a relationship of consultation is paramount. As discussed in the previous chapter, forming relationships in this sense between museum and community is radically different to how museums historically functioned, and is seen as current best practices. This focus on relationships is a counter-approach, which is meant to connect communities to materials from their cultures. Museums have increasingly employed inclusive initiatives such as collaborative exhibitions, shared curatorship, and the engagement of Indigenous stakeholders in the management and presentation of their cultural heritage. Since James Clifford’s 1997 work *Routes: Travel And Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, the term “contact zone” has become “more or less synonymous” with these collaborative

endeavors in museums (Boast 2011: 56). James Clifford explains this concept as an expansion of Mary Pratt's idea of a contact zone as a place where geographically or historically separate groups establish ongoing relationships. In "Museums as Contact Zones," Clifford details how museums can function as contact zones, where diverse cultures intersect and interact. He argues that museums are sites where power dynamics, representation, and negotiation of meaning occur.

These types of museological relationships are discussed in "Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited" by Robin Boast, who revisits James Clifford's conceptualization of contact zones. However, his article examines how collaborations between museums in Western countries and Indigenous communities can actually perpetuate neocolonial power dynamics within these contact zones. Boast discusses the complexities and challenges inherent in such collaborations, questioning why museum scholars often portray only a partial view of the contact zone, despite acknowledging its inherent power imbalances. In sum, for returns this process might not be helpful. For example, the PRM has "developed an ongoing relationship with the Haida Nation and the Haida Gwaii Museum to provide access to heritage items for Haida people, and to better understand the objects in [the museum's] care" (Working with the Haida People n.d.). The relationship is about giving access and providing better understanding of subjects in the museum's collections, rather than facilitating returns. In this case, a delegation of Haida people visited the PRM in 1998 to request a return. Twelve years later, in 2010, the request was finally granted, but not until after a three-week-long visit to the museum and a decade of relationship building. Therefore, for returns specifically, this approach might offer dialogue as an alternative to restitution. Here we see an example of project versus process.

An offer of process and dialogue instead of return can be problematic. In Sarah Wright's article "When dialogue means refusal," her studies of critical development in Australia and Indigenous geographies concluded that dialogue "as it is often deployed is supported by a host of colonial logics that position many marginalized humans, and non-humans, as unable to communicate 'rationally'" (2018: 128). Wright challenges the notion that dialogue always leads to consensus or agreement. Wright further goes on to note that refusing these dialogues with colonial institutions can be a powerful political strategy, writing that "refusal, in these contexts, is neither a negation of the need for dialogue nor a withdrawal from the need to counter colonialism, but a refusal to be drawn into politics that enable colonialism" (Wright 2018: 128). In this sense, refusing the offer of a relationship of dialogue in lieu of a return can be a strategy. Applying Wright's assertions to museological returns, these protracted dialogues illustrate that dialogues do not always result in a return.

In the PRM webinar about museum work with the Maasai delegation, Nick Thomas noted this difference between a "project" and a "process," saying that museums "can't make working with source communities a project that'll be over in two years—it has to be a lifelong process" (Radical Hope Webinar 2021). Let us consider how this reflects anthropological theory: clearly this ethos aligns with anthropology given the emphasis on relations. However, considering the power dynamics at play, this approach is extremely unhelpful for returns. In essence, the prevailing application of anthropological theory is overshadowed by the concept of relationships and processes, which fails to yield fruitful outcomes due to prolonged timelines. In this sense, the present anthropological orientation proves unhelpful. However, using the ideas of Sara Ahmed's work on institutional complaints, a deeper understanding of returns could instead be formed

wherein we can understand how returns function as processes rather than completable projects.

The previous three sections have considered how anthropological attitudes, informed by a century of gift-exchange theory, have hindered our understanding of the nuanced dynamics of returns but can also offer new routes to deeper understandings. These next sections similarly explore how these occlusions and interpretations of anthropological theory can actually prevent returns, while simultaneously offering opportunities for reinterpretation of the idea of *the gift*.

5.5 Uncertain Provenance

As discussed, the archival occlusions in this case fit into the typology identified in the first case study, as they mainly either dehumanize, or distance the subjects from the violence of colonialism. This section therefore also considers the latter type of redaction, as uncertain provenance is used to distance the wicker head from the grave robbing of *Hale o Keawe*. This section therefore explores the uncertain provenance of the wicker head collected by the *HMS Blonde* in 1825, describing how the wicker head's positioning as a gift impacts its potential for return, before arguing that museological practice which truly adheres to the tradition of gift theory would encourage this return rather than challenge it. In this section, the issue of uncertain provenance is because two wicker heads were removed from Hawaii on the *HMS Blonde* in 1825. One of those heads went to the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in the United States, and the other went to the PRM in the UK. Both heads are still in their respective museums.

However, the missing information is that *we do not know which wicker head went to which museum*. I would like to first clarify that I will not be attempting to solve a mystery.

Before this work explores the narratives surrounding this case study, I will firstly add some context to how I am confronting this story. Primarily, this work has learned a lot from the writing of Becky Cooper, author of *We Keep the Dead Close: A Murder At Harvard And A Half Century Of Silence* (2020). Her investigation into a decades old murder at Harvard confronts and destabilizes the idea of story and narrative. I aim to accomplish something similar. Without spoiling the book, I might add that her research and writing of the murder is able to remind the reader that the “real story” is often unattainable, unsatisfying, and incomplete. In this academic research, this case study is the same; the lack of information leaves something wanting. For this case study, this means that we must comprehend and embrace that we may never be able to determine exactly where something has come from. This will be discussed more in the concluding chapter of this dissertation; however, this preface attempts to add context to the manner in which I am approaching my analysis of the narrative in this research.

Multiple scholars have engaged with this case study and have made their own attempts to create a version of the story of the wicker heads collection in Hawaii. For example, Adrienne Kaeppler has written extensively on the importance of tracing the exact histories of the materials in museums. In “‘L’Aigle’ and HMS ‘Blonde’: The Use of History in the Study of Ethnography,” Kaeppler attempts to trace the wicker heads taken on the *Blonde*, tackle this specific and intricate series of data in order to understand the story of their taking and keeping. She references historical drawings and newspapers in her detailed 1982 work, “Genealogy and Disrespect: A Study of Symbolism in Hawaiian Images,” and concludes that the PRM wicker head was stolen from *Hale o Keawe* and transported back on the *HMS Blonde*. Other academic work on these subjects has mostly agreed with Kaeppler’s assertion (Caldiera 2003; Kanaeholo 2024).

However, a doctoral thesis by Leslie Jessop (1999) dedicated a chapter to the muddled provenances of the wicker heads on the *HMS Blonde* and disagreed with Kaeppler. Jessop explores the historical use of the wicker head in its Hawaiian context. However, most important to this work is the fact that his research reached a conclusion that disagreed with Kaeppler's 1982 article. In Jessop's writing on this contested provenance, he explains that he believes Kaeppler has made a mistake: "Kaeppler has, uncharacteristically, introduced some confusion into the situation, by assuming that a wicker head taken by R. Bloxam from the *Hale o Keawe* is probably the one now in the Pitt Rivers Museum" (PRM: 4). Instead, Jessop explains that two wicker heads were taken on the voyage of the *HMS Blonde* and argues that the PRM's wicker head was not from *Hale o Keawe* but was given as a gift or as an exchange.

Jessop proposes two alternate possibilities for the collection of the wicker head, one by exchange at a market and one as a gift from missionaries. First, he suggests that the wicker head that was not stolen from *Hale o Keawe* might have come from an exchange during one of their stops on the *HMS Blonde*. He notes the section from Bloxam's journal below, which discusses one of their stops wherein Jessop believes a wicker head might have been obtained:

Our coming to reside on shore has been the signal for all the petty traffickers in curiosities to gather round us. Feather tippets and cloaks, war-helmets, weapons, mother-of-pearl fish-hooks, and even gods are brought to market; and as the latter article has been in much demand, the handicraftsmen have set to work and manufactured a few new ones, just as good as the old, but that they have never been worshipped and do not the antique-makers in Rome do the same. (Bloxam 1925: 137)

Jessop argues that the mention of "gods brought to market" could indicate that an *akua hulu manu* was brought to market. Jessop also posits a second suggestion, arguing that the wicker head might have been a gift from missionaries, and identifies the following

section of Bloxam's travel journals as a potential moment of acquisition: "His Lordship received this idol standard as a present from one of the missionaries" (Bloxam 1925: 141). Jessop's alternate suggestion here is that Byron received an *akua hulu manu* as a gift from the Christian missionaries. As two *akua hulu manu* were transported back to England on the *HMS Blonde*, Jessop argues that the PRM one might not be from *Hale o Keawe*. He bases his idea on a drawing of the wicker head published in a newspaper and which was documented as stolen from *Hale o Keawe* (fig A). He argued that the drawing depicted the wicker head in the AMNH (fig B) and *not* the head in the PRM (fig C).



Figure A
Drawing depicting
Bloxams subject stolen
from Hale o Keawe



Figure B
Subject at
the AMNH



Figure C
Subject at the PRM

The two *akua hulu manu* in the AMNH and PRM were both taken by the *HMS Blonde* but were acquired in Hawaii in different ways. Now, the potential for return hinges on the idea that only one of the heads was unethically removed, while the other was removed ethically. As such, *only* the head which was unethically removed under duress should be subject to a request for return. In this case, the wicker head cannot be returned if it cannot be determined which one it is of the two that are mentioned in firsthand accounts.

This is because one was ethically acquired and one was not. Thus there is a moral and ethical component being judged here by the museum. In this case, acquisition via gift is considered ethical. This section will now discuss how anthropological ideas of gifts are constructed, and how duress affects this. The effect of duress is critical to analyze here, as anthropology has clearly established that gifts cannot be given under coercion. The PRM policy includes conditions for return which exclude unethically taken collections:

- 2.2 Claims will be eligible for consideration if either of the following criteria apply:
- a. The object was taken under duress (including military violence, looting or theft), or other apparently legal transactions that involved use of force or coercion.
 - b. The object was communal property acquired from a person or persons of that community not authorised to give or sell it. (Procedures for Claims for the Return of Cultural Objects 2020)

In this section of the PRM policy, it is clear that subjects which are acquired unethically are eligible, while subjects which are acquired ethically are not. However, in the first section the boundaries of this ethical acquisition are defined with the following terms: duress, violence, looting, theft, force, coercion. This clear wording would indicate that in some way, the anthropological theory and the museum policy align. However, I argue that the anthropological museum has not actually adhered to a century of anthropological tradition.

5.6 The Implications of Gifts

The application of anthropological theory can occlude humanity and prevent understandings of the complex dynamics of returns. However, it can also prevent the actual facilitation of returns. As such, this next section explores how our orientations of anthropological theory can both challenge returns but also provide opportunities for returns. In this case study, museological conceptualizations of gifts prevent returns, but this section argues that using anthropological conceptualizations of the gift can also offer

opportunities for returns. In sum, Maussian ideas surrounding the gift can be mobilized to encourage returns.

The premise is as such: stealing from *Hale o Keawe* was unethical and eligible for return, but a gift is ethical and ineligible for return. However, I posit that this stance held by anthropology museums is in complete contradiction to a century of anthropological theory. Let us first attempt to intellectually grapple with this situation by agreeing with the premise that the gift was truly a gift. To follow in the anthropological convention would lead to considering these gifts to come with a reciprocal debt. As Mauss says, a gift must be reciprocated. As discussed in Chapter Two, *the spirit of the gift or hau* “obliges him to make restitution” (Mauss translated by Halls 1990: 90). By using Mauss’ ideas, anthropology might be able to offer a deeper understanding of return. When a gift is given, it must be returned with something equal or greater or else there is a debt created that must be satiated. If this is the case, as per Mauss, then the museum owes the Global South a heady debt. In this sense, a gift is both object and process. As discussed in detail in Chapter Two of this work, gift-exchange theory has been an influential presence in anthropology. *Hau* is not a forgotten idea of Mauss’ as a major anthropological journal is even named after it. Even the term “gift-exchange” denotes the reciprocity that is mandated by these social practices. As discussed in Chapter Two, the tradition of gift-exchange theory has emphasized how exchange encourages reciprocity and forges social bonds. However, this work argues that to truly adhere to this theory, museum practice would encourage returns of gifts, rather than exclude them from returns on the basis of their gifted nature. Ultimately, following Mauss means that even if the wicker head was a gift, a debt must be paid.

On the other hand, we might consider this situation by identifying how duress might affect this case. Mainly, can gifts be given in an environment marked by duress? Wayne Ngata said at a 2018 Repatriation Session of Pacific Arts Association event at the University of Cambridge that “a gift given freely cannot be returned” (Image F). However, a gift is not freely given under duress (Graeber 2011) and it has been established that the colonial experience is specifically marked by duress (Stoler 2016). Even the fragmented archive cannot fully occlude the duress in the Pacific, and Hawaii especially, at this time. In Bloxam’s journal, he noted that one elder present at *Hale o Keawe* that day appeared disturbed by the removal of sacred materials. This is a common feature of European contact in the Pacific. When Cook traveled to Botany Bay in 1770, the crew attempted to engage the people in exchange; however, entries from James Cook’s Endeavour journal note that “all they seem’d to want was for us to be gone” (Cook 1770). Even Blackwood discusses the reluctance of local people to talk to her, with PRM researcher Frances Larson noting that “the people were reluctant to give her information” (Larson 2006: 12). It is clear that there is no enthusiastic consent to the exchange of materials or ideas. Further, if, as Jessop argues, the gifts were received by Byron from Christian missionaries in Hawaii, the missionaries were not Hawaiian and therefore surely cannot give a gift of something that is not theirs.

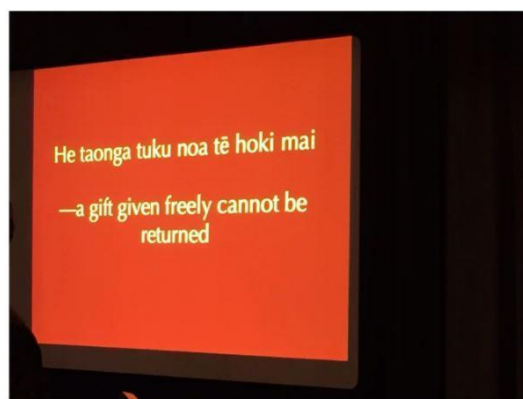


Image F: Slide by Wayne Ngata, 2018, Cambridge, Repatriation Session of Pacific Arts Association

Further, even if there was not such a clear lack of willingness to interact, the anthropologist would still ask: can a gift ever be given from colonized to colonizer? Most anthropologists, like Graeber, would argue against the suggestion that a true gift can be exchanged here given the power imbalances at play. Graeber argued that gifts from colonized to colonizer in these unbalanced power systems are more like endless debts. Graeber identifies these endless flows of tributes as a mark of dispossession (2011). In this sense, the materials in question could never be gifts. So, how might this anthropological definition of gifts and duress be seen through the PRM's policy? What are the implications of how our definition of "gift" is applied?

Going back to Mauss, in his endnote about the spirit of the gift commanding a duty to reciprocate, we are reminded that Mauss used the ideas of the spirit of the gift to also apply it to material theft. Mauss says that even if something is stolen, there is a duty to reciprocate, and *hau* commands one to make restitution. As such, if our museum practice regarding restitutions were to truly align with anthropological theory, how this wicker head was acquired is irrelevant: there must be a reciprocity in all of these potential types of acquisition of the wicker head.

Despite the presence of drawings and newspaper articles identifying these subjects and their specific provenance history as documented in the travel journals, there is still not enough evidence to yet satisfy certainty and facilitate a successful return. Unfortunately, the information that was missing was the type of information that is explicitly required by the museum for restitution. There was lots of material about the journey wherein these subjects were collected; however, it was not any information that could humanize a subject or aid in a return request. This aligns with the results of the first case study,

which showed that the occlusions are used to reinforce the position of the museum. This points to an interesting tension: there is so much documentation available, but it is not enough to facilitate restitution according to the museum policies. This also prompts inquiries into the rationale behind mandating such specific provenance information, considering that even with meticulously detailed archival documentation and travel journals, such information is frequently absent.

5.7 Kaeppler's Question

The previous sections have considered how anthropology makes occlusions and can both impede and encourage returns and our understanding of them. The next sections ask questions about how the fragmented archive is heavily relied upon for returns. Considering the importance placed on precisely understanding the acquisition process of this wicker head, what implications does this hold for the standards necessary for its return? Moreover, how might this stringent standard be utilized to reject return requests? In this next section, I examine how narratives are left incomplete and the high standards of provenance information required by museums to facilitate returns. Given the fragmented archive, how can restitution continue to demand such detailed provenance information?

This case study reveals much about the role of information in these requests for return. It is well accepted that the method of acquisition is a critical factor for considering granting or denying a restitution request. This position is not controversial and is easily stated by other anthropologists working on these specific collections; Adrienne Kaeppler's 1982 article on the historic specifics surrounding the materials collected by the *HMS Blonde* end with a justification of the level of detail provided by her work:

I am often asked why such minute details are important. Is it not enough to have objects back in Hawaii? It is not enough to know that the objects were from the 18th or 19th Century? Indeed, is it not enough to know that the objects are Hawaiian? The answer to these questions, to an anthropologist, is an emphatic “no.” (Kaepler 1982: 39–40)

Clearly, for Kaepler the validity of the request for return hinges on the information that is available. In fact, detailed information is positioned as absolutely vital. This is a difficult positioning to work with when the archives are full of black holes. Further still, these archival gaps and missing histories are used by museums and can be exploited to cast doubt upon the validity of returns. For example, the PRM online collections documentation contains a note on this provenance disagreement from Jessop:

Research notes: Related Documents File - Correspondence with Les Jessop, Keeper of Biology at the Sunderland Museum and Art Gallery, including his research and notes into this object, including unpublished excerpts of the diary of R. R. Bloxam. This object is also discussed in an unpublished, unpaginated, and undated typescript by Jessop entitled ‘Wicker Heads and the Gentlemen of the H.M.S. Blonde’, supplied to the PRM by the author in 2000. On 11 June 2016, Leslie Jessop supplied a revised version of his report entitled ‘1825: The Voyage of the Blonde’. **In both versions of his report Jessop argues that the ‘wicker head’ at the PRM should not be identified with the one that is known to have been taken from Hale o Keawe by R. R. Bloxam.** (1886.1.1448 PRM page 6, I have added emphasis myself).

This note reveals that after receiving a request for the return of this subject, Jessop revised a section of the thesis and supplied it to the PRM. The PRM had contacted Jessop and asked for permissions to share the doctoral thesis and mobilize his research in order to use it to address this request for return. In turn, Jessop provided a revised version 15 years later, which was still definite in its stance that the PRM head was not the one that had been so clearly documented on the *HMS Blonde* expedition. In this case, we see that only after a request for return was received did this information from Jessop become critical. This elusive provenance was not a research priority until the return was requested, which indicates that uncertain provenance is acceptable for museological keeping, but not for museological returns.

However, this work does not wish to focus on the intricacies and details of attempting to discover which wicker head went to which museum. This is not a provenance research project, but an attempt to make redactions to the subject of inquiry. The contribution here is that the information *we make to be critical* is not available. However, it may also not be enough to answer Kaeppler's earlier question with a "yes it is enough just to know it was from colonial spoliation." We might look to understand why it has been *made to be* important that we know the exact details. Given the vast amount of detail in the provenance history of these two wicker heads, there are enough occlusions that it is still not satisfactory for the museums. More disciplinary renovations might be needed to address why we enforce these conditions for eligibility.

As discussed, Kaeppler had asked "Is it not enough to have objects back in Hawaii? It is not enough to know that the objects were from the 18th or 19th century? Indeed, is it not enough to know that the objects are Hawaiian?" (Kaeppler 1982: 39–40). Kaeppler's question has been answered definitively by many claimants. In Teresa Wilkins' study of *akua hulu manu* at the University of Hawai'i, she says that holding these *akua hulu manu* in museums is a violation of the traditional *kapu* system of Hawaii (2008: 62).

Traditionally, visual access to these subjects was restricted and Wilkins notes that viewership and visibility of *akua hulu manu* is regulated to fit into the social and religious systems of Hawaii. She explains how these subjects are meant to be displayed from a great height and only to certain audiences. Further, Wilkins argues that museological ownerships disavows the presence of *mana* (2008: 66). Regardless of the method of acquisition, Wilkins argues that these subjects should not be in a museum. Further, Maja Petrovic discusses how in Tasmania she stayed with a community who had requested restitution and successfully had human remains returned to them. The community had

then buried the returned human remains in their traditional practice and with ceremony. Petrovic asked them how they could be so certain they were doing the right thing, because the unclear provenance meant that they might not even be from their local community. Petrovic notes that an older activist said that concrete provenance “isn’t essential. The only important thing is that we have got them back... that the bones are not abroad anymore” (Petrovic 2005: 67).

Of course, the answer to Kaeppler’s question is surely not something that should be decided by the museum, yet after many years of statements from claimants, the museum still enforces its expert authority. This aligns with the narrative positionings in the previous case study, wherein the museum retains its expert authority to make these decisions. Claimants and activists have been succinct and clear in their requests and understandings of restitution for many years. These have been documented by many academics like Teresa Wilkins, Maja Petrovic, Laura Peers, Cara Krmpotich, and Alison Brown. However, this work is not about those stories or voices; the academic role of giving voice to activists and communities is one that should be undertaken by those who are part of those communities and not by myself as a white researcher. This work is not about documenting what source communities and stakeholders are saying: on the contrary, this work is instead about understanding what kind of structures we are attempting to incorporate those voices into.

This question posed by Kaeppler occurs in many cases of returns. It is a pressing question, but often this insistence on concrete provenance can be mobilized to prevent returns. To answer Kaeppler’s question with a “No, it is not enough and we must know exact provenance” can open space for returns to be denied. The occlusions can become justifications against return because, as discussed earlier in this chapter, in this case it is

likely that the first attempted request for return from 2015 was rejected, sparking a new amended request in 2020.

In a different famous request for returns, this occurred and was used to deny a request. In the case of the wooden shield at the British Museum, research surfaced soon after a request for return. After having been discovered in the museum's collections in 1978, an Australian shield was displayed as having been collected from Botany Bay in 1770. The historical accounts of Cook's encounter in Botany Bay seemed to match this shield perfectly. For example, Nicholas Thomas writes that "it is clear from Banks's notes that it was picked up by one of the Aboriginal men who had thrown spears, to defend himself when the intruders opened fire – he dropped it as he withdrew." (2016: 76) Alongside this, further evidence for this provenance history was a small note on the back of the shield which said CAP: COOK in James Edge-Partington's handwriting (Thomas 2018: 13), and a drawing of the shield in travel journals by the Botanical illustrator on board the Endeavor ship which identified it as from this event (British Library, Add MS 23920, f. 35).

This provenance history was generally agreed on for decades until the request for return. The British Museum displayed this shield with interpretation stating it was taken during Cook's violent skirmish at Botany Bay in 1770 for many years. In 2015 the shield was sent to the National Museum of Australia in Canberra as a part of the Encounters exhibition where it was displayed with reference to its collection on the beach of Botany Bay. While on display in Australia, a very public request for return was declared. However, a year following this request, the museum hosted a two-day workshop in May 2017 to debate the stated provenance of the shield. From that workshop, the Oceania Curator at the British Museum, Gaye Sculthorpe, released a paper in *Australian*

Historical Studies with Maria Nugent, questioning whether the shield was from the Botany Bay incident. The paper indicated that work to “to test the argument – or widely-held belief – that the shield was collected at Botany Bay in 1770” (Nugent and Sculthorpe 2018: 37) was urgent and only done because of the request for return. It states: “The politics of repatriation, which had been activated by the shield’s exhibition in Australia in 2015 in particular, has made such research more urgent” (Nugent and Sculthorpe 2018: 43). In the same issue of *Australian Historical Studies*, Thomas published “A Case of Identity: The Artefacts of the 1770 Kamay (Botany Bay) Encounter” where he recanted his earlier statement from two years prior about the provenance of the shield (Thomas 2018). These two articles both came out of this BM workshop and both question the Botany Bay provenance.

In this example, we see how the archive is treated as infallible, even though it demonstrably is fragmented and unreliable. Both of these new articles which contest the earlier provenance of the shield discuss how at this workshop, “researchers reconsidered ‘the species distribution’ of the wood; compared the shield to others held at the British Museum; reviewed museum records and registers; and re-read British First Fleet records searching for details of the shield” (Keenan 2022: 6). However, in “How the British Museum Changed its Story About the Gweagal Shield,” Sarah Keenan notes that “in each of these research methods, the frames of reference the shield is being tested against – botanical species categorizations, the British Museum collection and catalogue, and British colonial shipping records – are treated as sources of authority capable of revealing the shield’s true identity.” (Keenan 2022: 6). Here, the reliance on the archive produces knowledge which works against claims.

Keenan argues that “Indigenous and anti-colonial methodologies do not appear to have been used at the British Museum’s workshop. Had such methodologies been adopted, different knowledge about the shield is likely to have been produced (Keenan 2022: 6–7). Keenan argues that rather than conducting X-ray fluorescence tests on the shield to detect traces of lead as Nugent and Sculthorpe do, or “re-examining the angle from which an 18 century British botanical illustrator sketched the various objects brought back to England on the Endeavour” as Thomas does, that Indigenous methodologies might instead consider how the shield reflects the profound and inseparable bond between Indigenous people and their land and cites authors such as Moreton-Robinson. In this case, prioritization of a clearly malleable and broken archive results in the ability for a claim to be refused. We have seen loss of information due to entropy earlier in this dissertation, but now also a loss of information due to research.

Despite the fact that both these articles expressly state that they do not wish to impact any requests for returns, that is ultimately the outcome. Thomas stresses that “the present essay is not concerned to offer a commentary upon, or an assessment of, this or any other repatriation claim” (Thomas 2018: 7). However, that is ultimately how these two works are used. For example, despite the existence of many scholarly works on this shield (see Thomas 2016, Vanderbyl 2022, Attenbrow 2014), the BM website provides only two references for further reading: the provenance articles which assert that the shield was not from the Botany Bay incident, written by Thomas (2018) and Nugent and Sculthorpe (2018).

This is a glaring omission, as there is much other work about the shield other than the two articles that came from the BM workshop. In these articles, a key factor which destabilizes the restitution claim relates to the type of wood that the shield is made from.

Nugent and Sculthorpe argue that the wood is not from the Botany Bay area and therefore the shield is likely not from this encounter with Cook. However, other articles might provide clarity on how the type of wood should not exclude the shield from tracing its provenance to this encounter. In 2014, Val Attenbrow described networks of trade between aboriginal Australians which can provide an explanation as to why the wood is not from Botany Bay. In his research, the knowledge that the wood is from another area of Australia does not undermine the claim that the shield was collected at Botany Bay by Cook. These articles might provide an opportunity to supplement the knowledge about the provenance of the shield, but instead only the two post-request articles are provided on the website. This push to create new research which destabilizes the return claim has been criticized by Keenan, who argues that “the effect of this published research is to undermine Kelly’s repatriation claim, and to strengthen the British Museum’s position in retaining possession of the shield” (2022: 8).

What is most interesting, however, is the simultaneous acknowledgement of a need for concrete provenance and also that the question of provenance would never be settled. Both articles indicate that the provenance is too sparse to be certain, while their institutions simultaneously require detailed provenance for returns. Nugent and Sculthorpe say that: “we are under no illusion that the question of the shield’s history can ever be completely settled (the evidence, in our view, is too patchy)” (2018: 43). Thomas reflects this same attitude, discussing “the sheer complexity of the history of early collections of this kind” and emphasizing that “the material, visual, oral and documentary evidence is fragmented, widely dispersed, often unavailable online and difficult to interpret. Many publications include errors of fact or interpretation; museum artefacts are often incompletely documented or misattributed, in some cases in publicly accessible catalogues” (Thomas 2018: 5). Fundamentally, all researchers agree that the archive

and documentation is fragmented. There is agreement across the discipline that there will never be enough provenance information to be certain: we have established that the archive is too fragmented for certainty.

From this position, many believe the answer to Kaeppler's question must be that the details of the provenance are no longer relevant. One of the authors of the report from the workshop addressed Kaeppler's question, indicating that the actual provenance of the shield may not be relevant given its cultural significance. In a CBC series called "Stuff the British Stole," Nugent questions whether concrete provenance even matters:

The kind of question for me is if we proved it one way or the other, would it really make any difference to its symbolic significance, which it's acquired over the last 50 and 60 years and in a more intensive way in the last 5 to 10 years? (Fennell 2023)

Nugent also poses Kaeppler's question and she does not answer with a definite no, as Kaeppler did. Yet her report was still used to prevent the return of the shield at the BM. Despite the support for returns, museum policy requires a certain provenance for eligibility. The support for returns that is stated in these articles is in contrast with how museums actually function. For the PRM, policy states that provenance must be documented and will be assessed based on the "strength of the supporting information provided by the claimant." In section 3.3, the PRM policy illuminates how this provenance becomes evidence:

2.3 All claimants must provide evidence of their right to make a claim including, where appropriate, documented support of recognised community stakeholders.

3.3 The claim should include as much information as possible about the object(s) being claimed, the reasons for making the claim, the evidence that substantiates the claim, and the justification for the claim. Claimants should state how their claim meets the criteria outlined in Section 2.

3.4 It is the claimant's responsibility to provide sufficient information to support their claim. (Procedures for Claims for the Return of Cultural Objects 2020)

Unfortunately for claimants, this type of documentation and evidence is not available, as we have established that “the sheer complexity of the history of early collections of this kind” means that a concrete provenance eludes us (Thomas 2018: 10). As was illustrated in case study one, this information has been excluded by the museological and anthropological system. The many occlusions of the archive have been constructed so that this information is scattered and fragmented. To fulfill the requirements of a return policy can therefore be extremely difficult. The PRM returns policy requires this type of information in order for claims to be eligible; one factual story is made to be a requirement for a successful restitution, but the data has been redacted too much to satisfy this. Because of this tension between archive, policy, and claim, as Keenan points out, “the dispute over this shield goes well beyond questions of individual ownership and genealogy and to the heart of British white supremacy established at the genocidal expense of Aboriginal Australia” (Keenan 2022: 8).

The issue here is related to whether we view these claims for return individually or within a greater context. Nick Thomas argues that colonial interactions should be localized and examined individually, emphasizing the importance of understanding these interactions within their specific contexts (1994). While this approach aims to provide a detailed and nuanced perspective on colonial encounters, it risks overlooking the broader narrative of dispossession that spans across different contexts and periods. This limitation is evident in the critique of Kaeppler’s approach, which raises questions about the archive’s role in supporting a localized understanding of colonialism. The archive, by its very nature, is inherently biased due to its selective redactions and omissions, which can distort or obscure the larger patterns of dispossession. By focusing exclusively on individual interactions without considering the overarching systems of dispossession, scholars may miss how these interactions are interwoven with and perpetuate broader dispossessive

structures. Thus, to fully grasp the implications of colonialism, it is crucial to examine not only the localized instances but also the systemic entanglements that frame these interactions.

For the PRM, the return of the wicker head and the drum is still pending without concrete provenance. The effect of the redactions is that one clear story of provenance is elusive and malleable. Not only are the provenance researchers aware of this, but the empire was as well. Thomas Richards explains that the preoccupation of the British Empire with controlling knowledge indicates their understanding of the malleability of their archive. He describes how “knowledge itself had become a weapon in the Empire’s arsenal, but a weapon of a new and flexible kind. What would happen if that knowledge fell into the wrong hands?” (Richards 1993: 111–112). In this sense, Richards writes that “they no longer even care what knowledge is, so long as they have it” (Richards 1993: 152). Clearly, the archive is generally accepted as flexible and sparse, yet still considered critical. In the end, provenance information is malleable and can serve as grounds for rejecting requests. Keenan writes that the shield is “trapped in the discourse of the latest knowledge preferred by the heirs of its colonial captors” (Keenan 2022: 8). In this sense, the archive can be mobilized for certain needs. Ahmed reminds us that fragments are sharp (2021: 15). These archival fragments cut.

5.8 Salvage Anthropology

Stepping back, these sections have identified the redactions of the museum, but I now turn to examine the outcomes of these redactions in-depth. In this section I consider Tuck and Yang’s moves to innocence and explore what narrative positionings are used to absolve anthropological collecting. Strathern noted that “much of the control that anthropologists exercise over their data rests on eliminating alternative perspectives in

favor of the one view they adopt” (Strathern 1991: 6). This dissertation has identified the cuttings on the cutting room floor; where the story has been cut. Now, this work looks to consider the story that was made with these snippings. This section therefore considers how these occlusions create a narrative of moral absolution through the notion of salvage anthropology.

In this case, the redactions facilitate the story of colonial dominance as seen through the typology of redactions contributed by this dissertation. In “Colonial Fragility: British Embarrassment and the So-called “Migrated Archives,”” Riley Linebaugh explains that “the tendency to conceal colonial history was and remains a habit particular to European states that are regarded as liberal democracies because colonialism challenges their claims to a morally just political system” (2022: 751). Therefore, this case study allows for an in-depth examination of how dispossession is manifest in the form of moves to innocence. In this sense, I now turn to interrogate how “power resides in the administrative medium of narrative” (Richards 1993: 136) and what that narrative accomplishes. The British Empire knew that their power relied on this administrative medium of narrative. Regarding imperial archives, Thomas Richards described the mountain of information which the empire used to create powerful narratives:

Though the archive threatened at times to overwhelm the state with a mountain of documents, more often the state began to imagine that it could perform feats of magic with knowledge, doing a lot more than merely acting as its curator. (Richards 1993: 73)

In this sense, the empire could create narratives and fictions. Richards is discussing archives specifically, but this can also be extended to consider how museological materials were used to create narratives. In Chapter Two, this work explored the colonial connections cultivated at Mauss’ Parisian institute, noting that it was only because of the colonial project that Mauss was able to see any of the materials he wrote about. As

discussed, Mauss was aware of the extreme violence involved in colonialism; the paradoxical narrative and the move to innocence here is directly stated by him, as he is concerned that anthropology and ethnography must continue in the colonies “as cultural practices and artifacts could disappear in one generation after the French occupation of new territories” (Mauss quoted in Mallard 2019: 30). Thus, a narrative is constructed.

In this case study, the narrative contains a clearly stated motivation to collect for the anthropological discipline, and specifically to collect for anthropology because the culture was almost lost. In this case study specifically, the knowledge that Hawaiian culture was soon to be destroyed was prominent. A later owner of one of these wicker heads explained in 1885 that “these two great wooden images were allowed to be taken away, Christianity having become the settled religion of the Island” (Kaeppeler 1982: 35). In his travel journals, the Botanist on the *HMS Blonde*, James Macrae, says that the people of Hawaii no longer valued their religiously significant items and that many of the idols that once adorned *Hale o Keawe* and elsewhere were being removed or destroyed (Macrae 1922: 72). Bloxam writes of a similar sentiment, saying that “the natives and chiefs who were with us seemed to have but little regard for anything there, and willingly granted whatever we were desirous of taking” (1925: 75). Byron says the same, noting that:

As the English officers were desirous of taking some of the ancient gods, and other articles deposited in the morai, to show in Britain what had been the worship and the customs of their Hawaiian brethren, the guardians of the place should permit them to remove whatever they pleased. (Byron 1826: 201)

This cultural shift is explained by Kale Kanaeholo in a conference presentation from 2024, who explains that five years prior to Byron’s arrival there was a religious upheaval. The young king, Kamehameha II, had abolished the traditional kapu (taboo) system under pressure from his biological and adoptive mothers. According to Kanaeholo, this

was not an easy transition and there were failed rebellions. Kanaeholo argues that this unique cultural period is “most likely why Admiral Byron and others could remove sacred items without fear of ... retaliation (Kanaeholo 2024: 5). Basically, as Christianity was spread to Hawaii, the extant culture was being replaced. Given that Hawaiian culture was fast disappearing, it was only right that the materials be harvested.

Macrae had visited *Hale o Keawe* on July 16, the day after Byron’s party. He wrote that he went to *Hale o Keawe* to harvest materials but that the mausoleum was already raided. In these travel journals, the botanist said that the men the day before “had taken away any memorials of the morai that could be taken” (Macrae 1922: 72). Field journals also note that the *HMS Blonde* crew “each of us took away some memorial of the place” and that “the Blonde soon received on board almost all that remained of the ancient deities of the Islands” (Kaepler 1982: 33). In some ways, the members of the *HMS Blonde* were correct in their assumptions of impending destruction: within two days of their arrival at the mausoleum, *Hale o Keawe* was emptied. The destruction that these men were racing was, in fact, their own acts of elimination.

This narrative of “salvage anthropology” is about preserving cultures who are dying and becoming extinct very quickly. The response to this narrative is to conclude that anthropology must save as much as possible. Tuck and Yang remind us that moves to innocence are narrative shifts that move oppressors towards absolution and away from responsibility or guilt. In this case, the move to innocence has a historical grounding in the manner of museological collection. Beyond the moves to innocence that are inherent in the distinctions between ethically acquired versus unethically required and which have been examined in this chapter, there is also this historical narrative which facilitates a move to innocence.

However, this narrative contradicts itself, as in the quest to collect for anthropology its demise was actually a major source of the destruction. It held simultaneously that anthropology could save a culture through documentation and collection, while at the same time anthropology was a complicit accomplice to that very same threat. This is evident in the manner by which the crew of the *HMS Blonde* was concerned with the loss of Hawaiian culture while simultaneously facilitating the destruction of Hawaiian culture. This is not a newly noted phenomenon but has been widely accepted since Fanon. Frantz Fanon argued that colonialism dehumanized the colonized by treating them as inferior and denying them the humanistic values that colonizers claimed to uphold. He pointed out that the colonial project was inherently violent and exploitative, justified by a civilizing mission that masked its true intentions of domination and economic exploitation. In *The Wretched of the Earth* from 1961, Fanon emphasized the brutal realities of colonial rule, highlighting how the colonized were subjected to systemic violence, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure. He critiqued the European colonial powers for their hypocrisy in preaching liberty and equality while enforcing racial hierarchies and oppression.

Fanon's analysis resonates with Dipesh Chakrabarty's critique of European colonialism in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* from 2000. Chakrabarty explores how conceptualizations of global history were influenced by the tendency to view European experiences as universal and normative. More specifically, Chakrabarty writes of this contradiction, saying that "The European coloniser of the 19th century both preached this enlightenment humanism at the colonised and at the same time denied it in practise" (2000: 4). Further, Priya Satia also writes in her 2020 book *Time's Monster* about how Britain's narratives of the past are shaped by the present,

noting that that the approach of the British Empire towards history was “an approach to conquest that preemptively insured against ethical doubt: the empire was an exploitative and repressive political formation built by men who often sincerely believed they were in the business of spreading liberty” (Satia 2020: 3). Satia argues that many imperialists genuinely believed they were spreading liberty and progress, despite the exploitative nature of their actions. This concept is tied to the Enlightenment’s redefinition of history as a linear progression toward improvement and civilization. Basically, imperialist narratives required these ethical tensions in order to absolve themselves.

We see this ethical justification in the collecting attitudes of this case study. In the expedition journals of the *HMS Blonde*, Bloxam specifically discusses two feathered images which were taken during their journeys: he discusses a wicker head which Kaeppler identified as the PRM wicker head, as well as another which he identifies as a helmeted god of war. In his writing, he is aware that taking this helmeted god of war is a moral wrongdoing, as he says that “from this sanctuary I sacrilegiously removed it” (Bloxam 1825). Clearly, he knew this was an act of violent subtraction. However, the narrative of Indigenous extinction provides a move for innocence, allowing for him to understand the “sacrilegious” nature of his acts, while still maintaining moral innocence. Bloxam believes that his actions are justified.

This exonerative narrative is not only historical but a more general contemporary narrative of museums and materials. The tension here is clearly illustrated by the photographic work of Sean Dooley displayed at the Horniman Museum & Gardens in 2013. His exhibition *After Lives* shows his photographs of the taxidermied specimens from natural history museums in the UK, making the point that these extinct animals

were very much so killed in order to be preserved for human benefit (Nicholls 2013). He says of his exhibition:

Natural history collections are a physical catalogue of the amazing diversity of nature. They allow scientists to describe and understand species; they also provide a firsthand opportunity for the public to experience the variety of life on our planet. However, every preserved specimen represents a life lost. The human need to understand, enjoy and benefit from nature must be balanced against the right of other species to the continuation of life. This balance is all too often lost, with human interests taking precedence (After Life n.d.)

This perspective from the natural history museums can be readily mapped onto salvage anthropology. The narrative supports violent destruction for the cause of knowledge production, absolving itself from the sin of the violence with the justification that it was a worthy cause. This narrative is pervasive for the colonial experience, evident in the names of the colonial location: The British “protectorate” exemplifies this perfectly through its choice of language. For 20th century anthropologists at Oxford, this “salvage anthropology” is typical. The violence is acknowledged as a wrongdoing, but is belayed by a moral imperative. These paradoxical positionings are common for narratives of empire. For example, during the removal of British archival documents from the Colonies, one of the individuals involved argued that “professional archivists would agree that a single repository for an entire collection was preferable to its dispersal across previously colonized lands. It was not mentioned that the removal of records from across the world upon decolonization was in direct violation of this principle” (Linebaugh 2022: 742).

This narrative of salvage anthropology was wholly a move to innocence. As described by Satia, “the harsh reality of conquest, slavery, and industrialism was accompanied, indeed significantly driven by, the search for imaginative relief from the dehumanization they caused” (Satia 2020: 58). It has been established that the violence of the empire was

total and that “Countless anticolonial thinkers and historians have proven the British Empire’s morally bankrupt foundation in racism, violence, extraction, expropriation, and exploitation” (Satia 2020: 40). However, of interest here is the way in which good intentions are in fact a form of managing conscience. Satia calls this a type of denial and explains that “there was little pretense that the empire was about anything other than the acquisition of wealth, little need for the justificatory narrative of the civilizing mission and plenty of opportunity for reckless fortune hunters” (Satia 2020: 36).

Of course, for the British Empire this move to innocence goes further, ultimately using the idea of history itself to absolve the empire of responsibility. In this sense, the academy is complicit. Priya Satia has detailed how the British Empire used historicism as a move to innocence and explains that:

It is not obvious, *prima facie*, whether the ethical orientation of the Athenians or that of the Spartans is superior; only with the passage of time and the ultimate Spartan victory does it become clear that the Spartan outlook was the right one. History thus becomes, in this text, a system of ethical accountability in itself... It turned out in the end that Athens was wrong. Time showed this, eventually. There may be no necessary relationship between goodness and victory, but the triumph of good fulfills a certain narrative necessity common to many systems of ethical accountability. (Satia 2020: 17–18)

In this sense, the civilizing mission evades responsibility, but time and history itself will also redeem the British Empire. One of the main issues with this perspective in anthropology lies in the temporal distortion caused by this narrative. The idea of a soon-to-be-extinct culture warps time by positioning these cultures as almost-past. Anthropology has always struggled with its special ability to make things past. In “That’s Enough About Ethnography!” from the *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* in 2014, Tim Ingold argues that the way ethnographic narratives are constructed can create a misleading impression that the conditions observed by researchers are pre-existing states rather than outcomes influenced by the interaction with the researchers

themselves. This temporal distortion means that the effects of the researchers' presence and engagement are projected backward in time, giving the false impression that what is observed is an unaltered, original state. Ingold writes that there is a "temporal distortion that contrives to render the aftermath of our meetings with people as their anterior condition" (Ingold 2014: 386). In this sense, all anthropology is done in the aftermath. Ingold argues that this can lead to an inaccurate representation of the cultural and social dynamics being studied, as it ignores the changes and influences introduced by the ethnographic encounter. Similarly, this anthropological framing is not useful for returns: in this framing, the violent collection practices are absolved, and those participating can employ this narrative to make moves to innocence.

5.9 Conclusions

Ultimately, the big story here is that this lack of information can prevent returns, but not only can it be used to deny returns, it can also absolve responsibility from the colonizer. The underlying theme in this chapter is concerned with how our structures enact dispossession, or alternatively, how occlusions in archive, museum, and theory, exclude possibilities for understanding and facilitating returns. Here, our understandings of return are further inhibited by how anthropological theory is applied. As in this chapter with Mauss' ideas of *hau* and Strathern's ideas of anthropological severance, this next chapter will continue to explore how museums can instead better align to anthropological theory to deepen understanding of institutions and returns.

Expanding on these conclusions, we must acknowledge the broader implications of how information gaps perpetuate historical injustices. The strategic absence of data not only hinders the process of returning cultural artifacts but also perpetuates the erasure of

colonial accountability. This chapter underscores the systemic nature of dispossession, revealing how institutions like archives and museums, along with theoretical frameworks, often obscure pathways to restitution. The challenge lies in how anthropological theories, such as those proposed by Mauss and Strathern, are applied in a certain manner but can also be reoriented.

To readers, the self-censorship of this work is frustrating as this chapter has become a story about transparency and speculation. Self-censorship is difficult for the writer as well. The sheer multitude of potentialities to discuss is overwhelming. The anthropological voice falters when it is forced to handle the speculative, wavering when it veers away from concrete facts, specific names, and exact dates, grappling instead with conjecture. While certain sections of this chapter were able to lean on the familiar cadence of traditional discourse, the next chapter departs from this established voice and works in the realm of speculation.

Chapter 6: The Impossible Return

This final case study is about a hypothetical return. While the earlier chapters looked at the very first return as well as a current PRM return, this chapter examines a return that will never occur. As described by Watkins, in recent decades there “emerged a new category of subject/object – the repatriable – something that has the possibility of being returned” (Watkins 2018: 33). This case study focuses on human remains that are not in this repatriable category. There is simply not enough provenance information for a return to be facilitated within current museological processes. The final case study therefore builds on the previous two cases in order to illuminate how these dehumanizing occlusions and black holes are critical. These voids have a gravity that transcends space and time and persists until now and is a force which makes rehumanization impossible and removal from display or recontextualization inadequate. Each chapter builds up these ideas, looking at the structures and noting that information voids make both returns and their current alternatives impossible on all structural levels. Finally this chapter makes practical suggestions for how to address this stalemate.

Christina Sharpe described studying the aftermath of slavery as the “orthography of the wake” (2016: 20). This work borrows from Sharpe to consider “the multiple registers of ‘wake’—the path behind a ship, keeping watch with the dead, coming to consciousness” (2016: abstract). In this sense, this final case study considers the material debris in the wake and the human remains at the PRM which are likely to be impossible to return under contemporary structures. As such, this chapter explores speculative returns and considers the majority of museological human remains in museums, which too often have just a continent named as a source of origin. Using a creative voice and form, the aim of this final case study is to demonstrate how the information and structures affect

returns, showing how the information loss makes returns, rehumanization, and reinterpretation almost impossible. Finally, this chapter explores the outcome of these redactions on narratives of empire and how to address the impossibility of return.

6.1 Unreturnable Majority

This next section represents the final attempt to use the traditional anthropological voice to understand human remains in the PRM and marks the final experiment in using names, facts and dates to understand a category of human remains that has no attached names, facts, or dates. Again, this category of unrepatriable subjects is the largest category of human remains and almost nothing is known about them. In keeping with the Pacific focus of this work, I first collected statistics regarding the Pacific human remains at the PRM which 1) have minimal/no provenance information, 2) have partial provenance information, or 3) have full provenance information. In this sense, I attempted to find any sort of names and dates and facts according to the academic tradition I was trained in.

For this section, I relied heavily on statistics which were made available online by the PRM and which analyzed the museum's collections. However, despite many categories of the collections that are searchable on the online collections database, there was no category for human remains in the many classifications of the collections. Fortunately, the PRM has hosted a spreadsheet online which contains a list of the human remains in the PRM collection. In sum, the PRM holds over 2,800 human remains. After a 2018 FOI request made by Maciej Wójtowicz, the PRM also provided information on non-European human remains at the museum specifically, responding that:

658 non-artefactual human remains belonging to different individuals or 840 actual individual remains some of which will be from the same individual. For example, in the latter figure, a cranium and mandible are 2 counted as two

objects even though they come from the same skull. In addition, 203 human remains specimens have a locality country stated as being non-European. Further, 1,040 human remains specimens have an unknown locality at country level, but most of these are probably of UK origin. (FOI Request 2018)

From these numbers, we can discern that only 20% of the human remains taken from abroad have a documented country of origin. This means that for the remaining 80% of these remains, there is no recorded information about their country of origin. This lack of provenance presents a significant issue. The unprovenanced group of materials constitutes the majority of human remains in the PRM collections. The absence of provenance for such a large portion of the collection raises several ethical and practical concerns. Without knowing the origins of these remains, it is challenging to address issues of repatriation, as the rightful communities or nations to whom these remains belong cannot be easily identified. This situation also complicates efforts to respect cultural sensitivities and adhere to international standards and agreements regarding the treatment of human remains. Further, without any provenance information available, arguments for the scientific or educational value of these collections significantly diminished. Acknowledging this disproportionate split between unreturnable/returnable according to current standards requires that we reconsider our focus. Currently, most restitution work is focused solely on this 20% of provenanced collections, when in reality, the other 80% requires more attention.

Of the entire collection at the PRM, not just human remains, I was able to determine that there are 2,349 objects that have no provenance information and could be from anywhere. Further, we know that there are 478 materials which have no provenance except that they are from the Pacific. This includes Australia, Hawaii, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia, the Sandwich Islands, etc. I would like to comment on the collections more generally here, to consider the weight of how much of the

museum's collections are from this Pacific area. The total number of objects in the collections that are from Oceania were mainly collected during colonial rule. Over 15 thousand objects taken during colonial rule as compared to fewer than three thousand from when Oceania was not under British colonial rule (see figure 1 below).

Colonial or non-colonial continents in descending order of number of objects in PRM collections up to 1945	Number of objects
Africa colonial	38,141
Asia colonial	28,983
Europe colonial	26,456
Australia colonial	18,465
Oceania colonial	15,642
Europe non-colonial	14,326
Asia non-colonial	13,299
Americas non-colonial	11,293
Africa non-colonial	10,574
Oceania non-colonial	2,745
Americas colonial	2,634
Australia non-colonial	0

Figure 1. Countries of Origin

This information was compiled by the PRM for the Relational Museum project, and comments on its findings, stating that: “Even in the light of the global picture the Oceania collections are very dominated by colonial collections” (PRM 2003b: 16). This museological collecting was therefore mostly done under duress, given that the colonial experience was one of constant duress (Stoler 2016). Further, the statistics showed that collections that were taken from Oceania during this colonial time were mainly without provenance. However, the museum positions these drastically different numbers as a coincidence. In the report on the statistical analysis, the PRM notes that:

For some reason the only very revealing difference between these charts is that there is a much higher percentage of uncertain objects (which could be either archaeological or ethnographic) from colonial countries than for those outside the British Empire. *This has to be a coincidence we would have thought and not significant* but it does have the effect of reducing the levels of definite ethnographic objects quite substantially. (Emphasis added by author, PRM 2003a: 5)

It is clear that colonial collecting is connected to a lack of provenance research, something noted not just in this dissertation, but in the statistics that have been compiled by PRM researchers. This is a clear illustration of extractivism, but it is presented as a coincidence. Basically, when museological collecting is done under colonial duress, there are more occlusions and less provenance information available.

Beyond the ability to make returns, there are other consequences for this lack of collections documentation of subjects taken under duress. For example, a lack of documentation has enabled recent thefts from the British Museum (BM) in 2023. In this case, materials were stolen from the museum that cannot be traced as they were never documented. Two decades before the thefts, in 2002, the same curator who systematically stole these items from the BM had said that the collections were “chaos” (Iredale, 2002): a factor which was clearly exploited by the BM curator of Greek collections and sculpture, Peter Higgs. This chaos in the archive enables a culture of theft which evades responsibility. As Higgs has capitalized on, it is easy to steal something which has no information publicly available.

These occlusions and sprawling lack of documentation are common. Though the PRM might have a comprehensive collections catalogue available online, other museums like the BM have only half of their collections documented. As we saw with the case of the BM shield, materials are often found uncatalogued in museum storage. In the case of the BM, the catalogues of documented collections are not even available publicly. This culture creates an environment where theft can thrive; I argue that thorough museological cataloguing is needed and must be shared. However, the tension here again lies with the academic push towards identifying names and dates, despite the fact

that this goal is impossible given these statistics. This research has demonstrated how returns are prevented by occlusions: there is simply not enough information to facilitate returns. However, there is still tension because if these museological collections cannot be returned, what other options are there?

6.2 Re/humanization

For 80% of the human remains in the PRM collection, no return is possible as there is absolutely no provenance information available. Given that returns are impossible for this case study, what other options remain for subjects in museological collections? The following three sections consider alternate options for unreturnable objects and explore their limitations, problematizing the initiatives towards rehumanization, removal from display, and recontextualization. In the previous two case studies, this dissertation demonstrated how occlusions are capable of completely dehumanizing human remains. This next section addresses if that's even possible to rehumanize subjects and questions whether this impossible task of re/humanization should even be our goal for human remains in museums.

Museums function to dehumanize human remains. Museums often attempt to confront this dehumanization of subjects in the museum by attempting to rehumanize the people in their collections. Most models for rehumanization of human remains call for using associated texts (Zimmer 2017). Primarily, this takes the form of provenance research and attempts to match a name to a subject in the collections. To counter dehumanization, some researchers have suggested approaches such as “counter-forensics.” “Counter-forensics” is a concept that refers to the use of forensic techniques and methodologies in ways that challenge, subvert, or critique established power structures, official narratives, and institutional practices. Counter-forensics is

frequently used in the context of human rights investigations, such as uncovering evidence of state violence, war crimes, and human rights abuses. Organizations and activists use counter-forensic techniques to document and expose injustices that may otherwise go unreported or unpunished.

Counter-forensics is a critical practice that challenges and scrutinizes traditional forensic methodologies and their applications, especially within the context of human rights and social justice. Originating from the need to question the assumptions and biases inherent in conventional forensic techniques, counter forensics seeks to expose how these methods can sometimes serve more to reinforce existing power structures and injustices rather than uncover objective truths. This approach often involves re-evaluating forensic evidence, questioning the integrity of forensic processes, and highlighting how these practices may be manipulated or flawed. It aims to address how forensic science can be complicit in reinforcing state power and systemic injustices, particularly in contexts where marginalized or oppressed communities are involved.

The practice of counter forensics can take various forms, including the use of alternative investigative techniques, the analysis of forensic practices through a critical lens, and the mobilization of forensic evidence in ways that challenge dominant narratives and practices. For instance, counter forensics might involve applying new scientific methods to old cases to uncover overlooked evidence or reinterpreting existing data to challenge official accounts. It can also mean critically examining how forensic evidence is used in legal and political contexts, particularly to understand how it may perpetuate biases or fail to account for the complexities of human rights abuses.

In counter-forensics, an approach to counter dehumanization is to give name and identity to human remains. In “Reconceptualizing Museum Decolonization: A Proposal for the Repatriation of Agency,” Nicky Rousseau, Riedwaan Moosage, and Ciraj Rassool consider both apartheid-era atrocities and colonial-era racialized bodies. The authors bring together two previously separate lines of research: the bodies of those who disappeared under apartheid and the racialized remains housed in colonial museums. Moosage, Rousseau, and Rassool suggest understanding counter-forensics as “the exhumation and identification of the ‘anonymized’ (disappeared) bodies of the oppressor state’s victims, becom[ing] the key to a process of political resistance and mourning.” (Rousseau et al 2018: 24). In this article the authors elaborate on this technique of using counter-forensics to identify human remains:

Such practices are all directed at returning mortal remains to a social network – familial, other forms of community, even perhaps the community of nation – suggesting that the question of the social is key in re/humanising. To do this requires the single most important practice of re/humanisation – the restoring of a name, identification. (2018: 26)

This type of rehumanization through the restoration of a name is critical work in museums, as it counters the historical dehumanization that museums facilitated. However, I look here to the work of Moosage, Rousseau and Rassool, who have also grappled with the rehumanization of human remains that are used in heritage practices. They explain how rehumanization is only necessary if you are made inhuman, whereas for the families and communities of those who were dehumanized, they were never inhuman. Rousseau, Moosage and Rassool document their own struggle with rehumanization, noting that:

For those responsible for such dehumanisation, the persons whom they “disappeared”, or whose mortal remains they collected for racial science, were less than human and thus require humanization. Failing to acknowledge this, and to talk only of rehumanisation obliterates the agencies of those responsible for dehumanisation, and the extent to which this was socially entrenched and normalised. Conversely (even if enslaved and regarded as mere property,

racialised or ethnicised, deemed to be terrorists or communist proxies), to themselves and their families, comrades and communities, they were always human. For this reason, we speak of re/humanisation. (Rousseau et al 2018: 45)

As Moosage, Rousseau, and Rassool explain, rehumanization is only needed from the position of those who did the dehumanizing. The authors suggest using the idea of re/humanization instead, but also conclude the idea of re/humanization is elusive.

Moosage, Rousseau, and Rassool note the instability of these concepts, saying that:

The repeated oscillation between dehumanisation and rehumanisation arises precisely because of the persistence of a politics in which to be human is tied to the politics of the Enlightenment, whereby our very existence is tethered to its negative – those “sexualized, racialized, and naturalised others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies” as Rosa Braidotti puts it. Within such politics, Braidotti continues, “we are all humans, but some of us are just more mortal than others.” (2018: 26)

The crux of this tension is that certain information can make humans into objects and specimens, while simultaneously providing liberation from objectification. In “Open Access Violence: Legacies of White Supremacist Data Making at the Penn Museum, from the Morton Cranial Collection to the MOVE Remains,” Lyra Monteiro writes that “the data that colonizers create out of the bodies of those they oppress is itself violence” (2023: 107). Critically, Monteiro argues that the violent data is not just the phrenological data of race sciences, but the online presence of data, images, and x-rays (2023: 107). To discuss this tension, Moosage, Rassool, and Rousseau draw our attention to the work of Allan Sekula, who describes a process of “Identification–Annihilation–Identification” in “Photography and the Limits of National Identity.” His idea of identification–annihilation–identification highlights the tensions between how “forensic methods (detective methods focusing on evidence and the body) offer a tool for oppressive states, but forensic methods have also become tools of opposition” (2014: 30). Sekula describes how “the oppressor state catalogs its victims as precisely as possible, typing them as a group but seeking to register and track individual members”

while simultaneously, the same cataloguing work in counter-forensics, for example, “the exhumation and identification of the anonymized (‘disappeared’) bodies of the oppressor state’s victims, becomes the key to a process of political resistance and mourning” (2014: 30).

However, as illustrated throughout this work, this type of information is occluded and cannot be discovered or recovered. In this research we have seen a prominent category in the typology of redactions wherein the occlusions in the archive make rehumanization impossible. The colonial archive prevents any sort of identification, making rehumanization an overly optimistic approach to these human remains. Yet, even if this information was available to re/humanize museological human remains, the human remains in museums are often on display and function as a part of a process which can uphold racist narratives. Monteiro also writes of this issue, noting that the ongoing circulation of racist analyses grounded in race sciences is similarly violent (2023: 107). For example, at the PRM the typological display discussed earlier in this chapter was used to create dehumanizing narratives of racism and domination. To re/humanize human remains which are then used to support racism does not ultimately rehumanize those human remains, as they cannot be re/humanized in order to be presented as subhuman.

The practical reality of museums is that the archive obscures the provenance information that might re/humanize a subject in a museum. This is the function of the dispossession: to dispossess of the right to be human. Rather than attempting to find names and dates within a broken archive, we might instead move forward from a knowledge that they can never be re/humanized. Much of the work of re/humanization that does not involve provenance research and reliance on the broken archive instead involves more scientific

testing. However, as this next section discusses, further invasive testing is specifically what claimants are seeking to avoid.

6.3 Storage and Scientific Testing

Essentially, re/humanization through provenance research is not possible for the majority of human remains in museums. Instead, human remains occupy a space-between, in limbo between personhood and objecthood. As Geary writes, displaying bodies “renders them ambivalent: both persons and things” (Geary 1986: 169). Given this inability to return or re/humanize subjects in the museum, other options for approaching human remains include being removed from display.

The Scoping Survey of Historic Human Remains in English Museums for the Ministerial Working Group on Human Remains from 2003 found that human remains were held in approximately 132 UK museums and universities with 67.4% having some or all of their human remains collections on permanent display (Weeks and Bott 2003). As such, the majority of human remains in UK museums are on display. In *Archaeologists and the Dead: Mortuary Archaeology in Contemporary Society* from 2016, Hedley Swain states that “in the West, it remains largely acceptable to display human remains” (2016: 171). However, Swain also argues that this has shifted and that there is now a “reappraisal of the place of human remains in museums” because of “past colonial associations” (2016: 173).

“Rethinking Purpose, Protocol, and Popularity in Displaying the Dead in Museums” from 2020 by Trish Biers discusses this movement away from uncritical display, and details how since the 1990s there has been increased debate surrounding the display of human remains. Biers argues that museums should move beyond sensationalism and spectacle

in human remains displays to a more ethical and respectful approach to exhibiting human remains. This shift is also reflected in the “Code of Ethics” for the British Association of Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology which recommends that “biological remains should only be...viewed for legitimate purposes” (2019: 4–5), As such, there is a shift in how human remains are displayed.

However, the more recent debate concerns whether human remains should be displayed at all. In “Exhibiting Respect: Investigating Ethical Practice for the Display of Human Remains in Museums” by Lia Tarle from 2020, Tarle notes that “most museums will no longer display Indigenous Ancestors, but whether and how to display other human remains presents an unresolved ethical dilemma” (2020: iv). As discussed in Chapter Five, the PRM no longer displays human remains as of June 2020. The PRM website notes that “Indigenous peoples have long argued against public display of their ancestors’ remains” and have since removed “123 items”⁶ from display (Human Remains in the Pitt Rivers Museum n.d.). In 2023, the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York City similarly pledged to remove human remains from its displays. Again, as discussed in Chapter Five, the Penn Museum vowed to make similar actions to remove any “exposed” human remains from display. Regardless of how human remains are defined, there is a clear shift towards the idea that human remains must be removed from display.

Despite this argument that these unreturnable human remains should be taken off display, there is also an accompanying notion that no further action is needed beyond this. In a BBC article from 19th January 2024 called “Is it ever ethical for museums to

⁶ Again, the museum uses the word “items” to describe human remains, even in discussions of ethical display.

display human remains?” by Christine Ro, the chair of the Human Remains Working Group of the German Museums Association Wiebke Ahrndt reminisces about when he became the director of the Übersee-Museum in Bremen, Germany. He said that saw that their museum displayed shrunken heads from South America without explanation, and felt that the shrunken heads must be “the first thing I put in storage” (Ro 2024: 3). However, in “Storage as a Form of Violence” by Fernando Domínguez Rubio in 2021, Rubio argues that there is a form of violence in storage. Rubio says storerooms are “powerful machines” that slow down death with the “complex infrastructural apparatus involving, among other things, massive energy-intensive air-conditioning systems, costly logistics, and high-end security” (Rubio 2021: 29). As discussed, the museum stops time in many ways and the prime museological principle of preservation is the foundation. Weil has described how museums were historically considered as “a permanent repository, a great barrel of amber in which things—once dropped—will be forever preserved” (Weil 1997a: 3). However, in this frozen space, Rubio’s work addresses the grave aspects of how the museum storage functions to create a void, where “any form of keeping entails a form of loss as its necessary and unavoidable shadow” (Rubio 2021: 29). These same ideas are used by this research, given that this work looks at the shadows of loss in these case studies which are critical to any theories of dispossession. Rubio further reminds us that “understanding how loss is created in the name of care in the silence of storages, is key to revealing the uneven geographies of power and dispossession” (Rubio 2021: 29). In this sense, we can consider how dispossession is manifested by our very storage rooms and the relationship between research and museums.

This aspect of temporal violence is important, but I am keen to realign this with the fact that there is actual physically destructive violence also occurring against human remains

even when they are removed from display and in storage. Primarily, even if human remains are not on display, they are sometimes still subject to destructive testing. As discussed in Chapter Two, the physical and epistemological divides, even within anthropology, mean that despite the epistemological reckoning which occurred in cultural anthropology may not have occurred in the same way in other fields. Ethical practices can vary widely between the disciplines. In the case of archaeology specifically, Chris Evans has referred to a discipline as providing a “sense of an accredited or persuasive disciplinary ‘code’” (2007: 289). Of course, there are actual formal ethical disciplinary guidelines which have been in use for many years. For example, these disciplines may follow the respective guidelines set down by the Museums Association, ICOM, the Museum Ethnographers Group, the European Association of Archaeologists, the Vermillion Accord on Human Remains, or the British Association for Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology (BABAO). However, it is important to note that these guidelines are in keeping with a type of ethics which has always privileged a Eurocentric perspective and is sometimes outdated. Despite arguments that anthropological material culture studies has confronted their role in creating racism and taken steps to mitigate it, assuming that these bodies are safe in our storerooms with the promise of an undisturbed non-burial in their acid-free storage box may not be true given that we offer up these unburied victims to continued research—research which may not have shared the same disciplinary experiences.

Other disciplines use museological collections for research, and “concepts/ways of thinking have emerged over the past decades that disrupt the continuous existence of remains and artifacts as subject/objects but are not applied to anatomical collections” (Watkins 2018: 34). In “Anatomical Collections as the Anthropological Other: Some Considerations,” Rachel Watkins also reminds us that “Bioanthropology lags behind

other disciplines in self-critical examination due to an ongoing conflation of critiquing scientific racism with critiquing structural racism” (Watkins 2018: 31). For example, many academic books in bioanthropology still prominently display pictures of human remains on their covers, an action that is widely criticized and no longer practiced in cultural anthropology (Curtis 2003, Giesen 2013). Further, in “The Genetic Reinscription of Race” from 2007, Nadia Abu El-Haj explores how genetic research and technology contributes to the perpetuation and reification of racial categories. El-Haj argues that despite the scientific consensus that race is a social construct with no biological basis, genetic studies often reinforce racial essentialism by attempting to link specific genetic markers to racial identities. The article critiques the reductionist approach of genetic research, which overlooks the complexity and fluidity of human genetic variation. Basically, regardless of the stance of anthropological museums, museum stores are still available for use by other disciplines. And these other disciplines might still support outdated views which have been disavowed by anthropology.

The issue here is that there has been much information stolen alongside materials. The data and testing produces equally violent data points. When Sara Baartman’s body was finally returned to South Africa, the cast of her body was returned alongside it because this information that was produced from her body was equally as important to return. Similarly, to address how data and information is used, in the USA there has been a recent push towards expanding NAGPRA to encompass these types of biological samples taken from Indigenous Americans, and an argument that these samples deserve similar rights (Bader et al 2023). This issue extends beyond the context of human remains in museums and persists into the present day, as demonstrated by a 2010 legal settlement involving the Havasupai Tribe and Harvard University. In the case of the Havasupai, DNA samples provided for specific medical research were used for

additional, unapproved studies, highlighting ongoing ethical concerns regarding consent and data use (Harmon 2010). Eventually, Harvard agreed to offer “\$700,000 to 41 of the tribe’s members” and to “return the blood samples” (Harmon 2010: 1). This points inquiry towards how information is used and similarly exploited or extracted even in storage. In this sense, hiding subjects in storage is a limited response to the problem of museological human remains.

Regardless of whether they are displayed or not, Monteiro reminds us that museum collections illustrate “how white scientists extract data from the remains of the Black and brown dead in order to support their interests” (Monteiro 2023: 109). This is especially evident when museums receive requests for DNA sampling. This common practice is often destructive to a particular spot in the inner ear. Some DNA testing involves pulverizing teeth and is incredibly destructive. However, the best minimally invasive spot to accurately DNA test museum skulls is the petrous bone in the inner ear as it is one of the more dense bones in the human body and was proved to be one of the more accurate sites (Freedman et al. 2018: 25). This posthumous harm is a very physical violence.

Harvesting from museums is a common sampling pool. David Reich, the head of the Harvard genetics lab, has openly discussed sourcing human remains from museums for his DNA work. In an interview with RR, when asked “Where did you get the ancient farmer data from Iran from?” he responded by saying that they got them “From the University of Pennsylvania Museum; there’s bones in the basement, and they drilled those bones and got the DNA from those bones” (Rosenbaum 2017: 12). The interviewer continues,

RR: "There must be an enormous quantity of old bones and museums and things like that in China that have yet to be—"
DR: "Prepped."
RR: "Harvested? Is that...?"
DR: "Correct." (Rosenbaum 2017: 13)

In this exchange, the language reveals that these human remains in museums are undergoing the same construction as harvestable objects. In more sinister cases, human remains in collections can be used for DNA testing which supports racism. As discussed above, Monteiro writes that the ongoing circulation of racist analyses grounded in the race sciences constructed from this type of scientific testing is violent (2023: 107). Even if your body eventually escapes the museum and a restitution request is successfully granted by the museum, your genetic information and the data already extracted from your human remains could still be used. Some institutions might even try to extract this data precisely because a return is impending. When Michael Mansell was negotiating for the return of Australian human remains from a variety of British museums in 1990, a newspaper noted that Mansell obviated the idea of compromise to offer the return of human remains in exchange for testing before their return, which would have involved more "measuring, model-making, computer imaging and extracting sample cores" (Langsam, 1990).

However, sometimes permission is not asked before testing or done despite consent being refused. For example, before a return of human remains through the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) in 2006, the Natural History Museum announced that they planned to "conduct invasive tests of the remains before handing them over. The Museum acknowledged that TAC had repeatedly advised that testing was prohibited" (Wilson 2007: 19). The museum stated that last minute testing was a reasonable request, saying that "the decision to return the Tasmanian remains, following a short

period of data collection, is a commonsense one that balances the requirements of all those with an interest in the Remains” (Wilson 2007: 19). However, as Wilson notes, in this weighing of stakeholder interests, the “interests of the scientists in wanting to grope the Aboriginal dead were seen as equal to the cultural obligations of Aboriginal people” (Wilson 2007: 19). Ultimately, the remains were returned, but they were still damaged, as the museum proceeded to “pull teeth from jawbones, dismantle a skeleton, chisel pieces of bone and crush them to extract DNA samples” (Wilson 2007: 20).

This type of scientific testing can align with the goals of anthropologists to re/humanize subjects in the museum. The issue here returns to the problem in the section above, which is that rehumanization through further scientific testing is still violent even if the aim is re/humanization. The most interesting development here is to note that the push towards rehumanization through further scientific testing from anthropology aligns with the same goals as biological race sciences. The end goal of more testing becomes the same. However, when museological human remains are used for research purposes, they are made into objects again and again. As explained by Watkins, bioarchaeological and bioanthropological studies make colonized bodies into “‘raw material’ for the production of scientific knowledge” (Watkins 2018: 32). In this sense, the ways in which academic research uses these human remains produces an inhumanity, wherein human remains are not human when they are in museums, even if they are not on display and are held in storage.

6.4 Recontextualization

If re/humanization is impossible, and removal from display inadequate, then how else might anthropology confront this stalemate? What can be done for human remains in museums? Many suggest recontextualization, which has played a critical role in similar

museological shifts towards acknowledging that the “Museum is Not Neutral” (Sentrance 2018) and that there is a museological duty to provide ethical interpretation that models critical thinking (Meszaros 2008). The idea offered by this type of reinterpretation is to “display it like you stole it” and to re-think the politics of display (Proctor 2017).

This work is important; however, this type of reinterpretation is not an alternative to restitution, which is the option espoused by Historic England as “retain and explain.” Generally, prioritizing this type of recontextualization over actual returns is prevalent in scholarship and practice. Errol Francis, artistic director and CEO of Culture&, promotes this idea, stating in an interview that “when people are discussing removal, we should be steering the conversation onto reinterpretation because destroying pieces of history sets a dangerous precedent” (Styles 2020: 8). This interview later goes on to say that “rather than simply seeing items returned to their places of origin, Errol Francis thinks industry standard storytelling is also in need of a drastic refresh” (Styles 2020: 7).

However, transparency about colonial dominance and recontextualized displays is not a replacement for return, nor is it necessarily new. Generally, world culture museums have already been telling the same stories of colonial dominance since the 1890s. Moreover, without any material changes, the visual politics can continue to tell the same stories of colonial dominance despite a new interpretive label. Despite claims of recontextualization, these narratives and displays still perpetuate racism, as the original “spin” is still present, and continues to function in support of empire and state. This is evident in the displays of Benin Bronzes, whose “reinterpreted” story still focuses on the dominance of the British over the Kingdom of Benin, and the material presence of the subjects contains paratext which tells of the Benin Bronzes as a trophy. Reinterpretation of a redacted archive cannot provide the antidote to the redaction. The dispossession is

so pervasive that you can't simply add more information. Strathern notes that "much of the control that anthropologists exercise over their data rests on eliminating alternative perspectives in favor of the one view they adopt" (Strathern 2005: 6). This same phenomenon occurs with the archive. As proved by this work, the archive has eliminated any information which might humanize or indicate violence. The mechanisms of the anthropological material culture function to ensure that data can be eliminated in order to tell a certain story. Without that eliminated data, the story always remains the same, even when told in a different way.

In *Producing Bodies*, Petrovic gets to the heart of this issue, explaining how post-conflict works to endure for as long as the violent redactions remain in museum collections. She says this temporal moment is protracted by the inability to name victims. This aligns with the findings of this work, which have revealed how redactions continue to dispossess. Petrovic reminds us that this "post" time will exist for as long as claims for return are made:

a temporal framework is given to the notion of postconflict time. A "postconflict" is consecrated and is destined to last so long as all the victims of strife are not named, identified and eventually commemorated. This time can last as long as there are claims to be made and given substance. (Petrovic 2005/2006: 70)

Thomas Richards also notes in his book *Imperial Archives* that the control of knowledge is so critical to empire that the knowledge itself does not matter as much as the control of it does (1993). In Chapter Five of this work, the provenance of the wicker head can be shifted to retain control of it. Similarly to the BM and the Gweagal shield, provenance can be manipulated because the knowledge isn't as important as retaining it. This is a key issue for proponents of using reinterpretation instead of restitution: reinterpreting the information of the archive in such a way that allows for the material to be retained. This

functions on multiple levels, such as when provenance is made malleable to when labels are rewritten as an alternative to returns.

Moreover, the inherent limitations of reinterpretation become apparent when confronted with the pervasive nature of dispossession within anthropological material culture.

Despite efforts to add more information or present alternative perspectives, the underlying mechanisms of control and redaction continue to shape the narrative in ways that reinforce existing power structures. Functionally, reinterpretation tells the same story, only with more details. Anthropology is certainly left with no option but to attempt to confront *the story*. This next section explores what that story is, and how it has been naturalised and made normal.

6.5 The Naturalization of Collecting

This section offers final thoughts on the role of anthropological material culture theory in museum praxis, first considering how these case studies have demonstrated the limitations of anthropological theory, before exploring its opportunities. Ultimately these closing sections of this chapter focuses on how anthropological theory can both hinder and aid in addressing these unattainable returns of human remains in museums.

More recently, anthropology has been increasingly dominated by discussions of relationships, social exchange, and gift theory. In this sense, our archival practices in the museum have mimicked the discipline. As noted by Jones, “over time, discussion of provenance has increasingly focused on relationships” (Jones 2019: 886). In this way, the museum borrows from anthropology, wherein the museum and the discipline develop concomitantly. It is also important to stress that anthropological theory believes itself to be working in the same spheres that it did historically. PRM researcher Larson notes

that: “Recent work by Alfred Gell echoes research methodologies used by anthropologists a century ago, when the new university discipline of anthropology was construed as a scientific subject” (Larson 2007: 89). Thus, the tradition of anthropology is strong and the museum and discipline rely on core theories of relations and exchange which have been prevalent for a century.

However, as this next section discusses, these theories have not yet been helpful for considering returns or for considering the 80% of museum collections which are unprovenanced. This section considers how museum collections are currently constructed by anthropology in order to seem to be a normalized and natural process. This section considers how material exchange is misrepresented by anthropological theory by examining how anthropological theory was historically mobilized to extract cultural materials and how anthropological theory can naturalize that process.

Historically, a tool of colonialism was to rely on the pretense of gifts and exchange in order to extract materials from their colonial subjects. As discussed in Chapter Two, this occurred in the Pacific and in India. Further, the use of ideas of exchange were also leveraged by the British following the sack of Benin. In this instance, the destruction of Benin was, and often continues to be, labeled as a “punitive” expedition. The British Empire could frame their physical violence as an exchange, for example by calling it a “punitive” expedition, where the argument was that this British expedition was an exchange of violence, in retribution for a murder. The punitive nature of this expedition has been debunked by Hicks who notes that the raid of the Kingdom was a planned setup and simply framed as retribution (2020). Looking back to McTague, the status of the destruction of Benin as “punitive” warrants labeling it as a fabrication. Yet this durable epithet remains as a monument to the justification and argument of reciprocal

violence. This historical grounding provides a starting point for considering how anthropological theory affects how we conceptualize material culture, returns, and dispossession. What can our current anthropological foundations reveal to us about dispossession? The museum is situated in many ways by anthropology and this section explores how anthropology positions the museum through theories of gift to god systems.

To start, anthropology uses theories which misrepresent material exchange. For example, in “Malangan: Objects, Sacrifice and the Production of Memory” from 1988 and *Malanggan: Art, Memory, and Sacrifice* from 2002, Susanne Kuchler discusses how certain Pacific cultures have traditional movements of materials which result in gifts to gods. The idea of gift to god systems centers on the understanding that certain objects, often exchanged during rituals or ceremonies, are not intended for human use but are, instead, presented as gifts to supernatural entities or deities. Kuchler emphasizes the symbolic and ritualistic aspects of these exchanges, where the act of giving transcends mere material transactions. She describes this phenomenon as follows:

Certain museum collections are not the result of “salvage anthropology” alone, but of the operation of “gift to god systems,” as sale became an alternative means of removing gifts from circulation. (Kuchler 1988: 625)

However, this final destination is also applied to museums from the Global North who colonially harvested material. In this sense, gift to god systems are championed as natural flows of materials, with the museum as the natural end point of that natural flow. Yet by taking these ideas seriously, we reveal that the museum is often positioned as sacred and defied. This is not an uncommon positioning, and is evident in order works which position the museum as a type of church. For example, Geary notes in his work on

medieval relics that the condition of human remains in museum is the same as religious relics in churches, stating that:

Both religious relics and bodies in museums are recontextualized human remains, removed from the graveyard or tomb, sites often associated with both literal and metaphorical pollution, into another sacred context where they are preserved for a different function. Reliquaries literally turn bones into objects, encased in precious metals and ornamented with precious stones, whereas museums objectify the bones conceptually for research and display. (Geary 1986: 169)

This is helpful for understanding how the museum is deified, conflating a museum collection with a sacred space. Even as recently as 2021 the director of the Cambridge anthropological museum, Nicholas Thomas, likened museums to religious buildings (Thomas 2021). He writes that “the argument that the museum is a site of ‘extreme violence’ rests on a pretty simple error” because it is common that “institutions may have been founded with philanthropic ambitions but later do harm and vice versa. Most religions have at times engaged in persecution, abuse or intolerance, but a mosque or church can be a space of solidarity, faith, contemplation or hope” (Thomas 2021: paragraph 5). Of course, this argument still confesses that museums are sites of violence, but also argues that this is irrelevant.

However, most importantly these excerpts indicate how the museum accession practice is naturalized. In anthropological material culture theory, the idea is that if the materials were going to decay or be destroyed for cultural purposes, then their rerouting to the museum instead is valid. Susanne Küchler writes that: “A popular alternative to object destruction involves the sale of the object as a way to render it absent” (1997: 39). We can see this gift to god theory in the manifestation of how Malangan decay is considered by the museum. For the Malangan people in Papua New Guinea, Malangan funerary carvings are made and then left to rot. Anthropologist Suzanne Küchler examined this

practice in the 1980s and noted that it was critical that the carvings decay and rot, with the smell and process of decomposition over time being a critical step in the mourning process. However she also said that when the systems that supply museums with collections intervene and prevent this process, that is acceptable and comparable. Küchler says that when museums interrupt this process, it is still part of the gift to god system. This positions the museums as an appropriate repository for the funerary items in these Malangan “gift to god” systems. Küchler states that museums who are purchasing Malangan funerary carvings before they rot are simply partaking in “the operation of gift to god systems” (Küchler 1988: 625).

Despite the fact that existence in the museum prevents decay and rot, Küchler argues that museums are a reasonable repository for these funerary carvings and that these encounters and exchanges are simply a part of cultural contact. She also explains that anthropologists commissioning custom museum materials is a natural part of the ways in which material exchange occurs in connected cultures:

The sale of wooden sculptures ... is also partly a result of the theme of connectedness that pervades both mode of representation and transaction and that facilitates the integration of both the region and the Western world. (Küchler 1988: 633)

Here Küchler explains that having these funerary carvings made specifically for the museum fits within the structure given by disciplinary theory. Basically, the entangled aspects of this material exchange allow for a subsumption of internal cultural systems into the larger imperial knowledge production processes. In sum, she recognizes that anthropological theories of exchange and entanglement make space for the museum to exist in a framework where this type of acquisition is ethical. In this case, Anthropological material culture theory naturalizes an extractive collection practice.

This naturalization of extractive museological collecting practices occurs in much of our dominant anthropological theory. This fiction of collection as a natural process is also found in anthropological usage of object biography as method. In this case, extractive museological is framed as just another stage in a biography. However, this is not an extension of the life of those human remains: this is a space of a frozen limbo, where you could go missing or be tortured with needles and used to create harmful racism that affects living humans. Object biography cannot help us consider this if it consistently positions this time as another natural life-stage in a process. The language of life is the antithesis to this time spent in the museum, which is a time of no life and frozen time, a death in non-consensual limbo.

In contrast to Millar's approach to the categories of provenance (see Chapter Three), I do not wish to present these histories as relationally equal. In Michael Jones' 2019 article "Collections in the Expanded Field: Relationality and the Provenance of Artefacts and Archives," Jones describes how "Laura Millar is one who has argued for combining the areas outlined above: chronological museum and art historical provenance; archaeological provenance; and archival provenance" (Jones 2019: 886). While I have used altered versions of these categories to focus my research areas, I would not wish to combine them. The reasoning for this is that if these types of provenance are conceptually combined they become just another part of a biography, instead of an aberration in traditional provenance. While most cultural materials have a creator history and a custodial history, including and merging an institutionally violent custodial history into the one large normalized provenance prevents the abnormal nature of these violent custodial provenance histories. The issue here is that these approaches require an emphasis on relationality. As Jones describes, this approach to provenance creates the idea of a life history of a museum subject:

Viewed diachronically, this perspective leads to the idea that things have biographies which can be explored, and which continue to evolve beyond the point when an artefact has been collected and stored by an institution. (Jones 2019: 887)

With this relational approach, the museum can consider the life of the object in a museum as just another part of the biography. However, when it comes to human remains, this is an ineffective strategy. As detailed by Hicks (2020), using object biographies and life histories for certain museological subjects does not reflect the very real death that is present. These humans are dead and have also experienced a second death in dehumanization. Instead of life histories and object biographies, Hicks suggests necrography. He argues that object biography cannot help us consider this if it consistently positions this time as a life stage in a process. The language of life is the antithesis to this time spent in the museum, which is a time of no life and frozen time, a death in non-consensual limbo. However, Rubio also reminds us that “in a museum, forgetting is not the other of keeping, much in the same way that necrography is not the other biography” (Rubio 2021: 29). In this vein, this work has not attempted a necrography, but can attempt some sort of obituary. The majority of the more moving obituaries I have ever read are about a profound impact. They are about what was left behind. In this case, what is left behind is a narrative and a construction of anthropology which challenges returns.

These conceptualizations of anthropology and museums as acceptable repositories of gift to god systems do not help in understanding how to confront the 80% of human remains in the PRM collections which have no provenance and no names, as they naturalize a process wherein museums become the final destination for human remains. In this section, I argued that anthropological theory currently misrepresents material exchange and naturalizes museological collecting. However, this next section argues

that not all anthropology is similarly obstructive and might provide better perspectives for positioning these unprovenanced human remains.

6.6 A Controlled Burn

Anthropological material culture and museums have worked against returns but also contain possibilities to further understand how returns function and how to address the 80% of unprovenanced human remains in museum collections. Finally, this work will now explore how anthropological theory can be reinvented to confront the dispossession that has been documented in previous chapters. The previous section argues that systemic dispossession in the form of subtractive occlusions across the archive, discipline, and museums has allowed for anthropological theory to be used in a way which is not useful for considering returns. Generally, this dissertation illustrates how we currently prevent deeper understanding of returns in the current uses of anthropological theory in the museum (for example, the focus on relations in the previous chapter which results in processes instead of projects in Chapter Five). However, I also argue that anthropological theory can be recast to provide better understanding of restitution (as in Chapter Four where Mauss and Strathern are reconditioned to better understand gifts and severance in returns). To frame restitution within the ideas of gift-exchange is not to position a return as a philanthropic gift from the saviors to the colonized. Accordingly, I am arguing against using a definition of restitution as a type of charitable gift. On the contrary, returning something is not benevolent welfare but instead a duty; a debt has been created and must be paid to the Global South.

Unfortunately, anthropological museums are not actually practising anthropology. Ultimately, the problem with humans remains is that they have caused an identity crisis. Instead, I posit reorienting our theory to more comprehensively intellectualize and

understand returns, and propose alternate methods for applying anthropology which can help consider returns and dispossession more fully. I would like to clarify again that this work is about criticizing what is over-represented; it is about using anthropology against itself. Chakrabarty identifies this tension, noting that “European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations” (Chakrabarty 2008: 16). In this sense, this work invites a discussion of a new perspective on anthropological material culture theory, one that repurposes and reconsiders how we use material theory to construct returns. To quote Archer and Souleles:

Rather than studying up with the intention of filling in the gaps of existing anthropological theories of power, however, we see studying up as a way to glean new, emic theories of power from people who many people think of as relatively powerful, and as a way to model different, perhaps less exploitative forms of anthropological engagement and practice. (2021: 198)

PRM researcher Larson said in 2007 that: “At this time, perhaps anthropologists can find some inspiration in the work of their predecessors when it comes to taking material culture more seriously” (Larson 2007: 90). Following this through, I make suggestions: what about if we take Mauss’ *hau* or Graeber’s *Debt* seriously and apply it to museum practise? These material theories have been neglected and the focus has instead been on relations and exchange. But there are aspects of material culture theory here that can be used to think about returns in ways that do not follow the same route that anthropology has been using for a century. Instead, this work argues for a realignment with anthropological theory. A reorientation of the theoretical focus of returns, from a flat material exchange to one of *debt* and *hau*, opens up ideas for new types of restitution, such as the public mass memorial sites suggested in the previous chapter. In a sense, I am following Ingold’s 2014 entreaty in “Enough about Ethnography”: “I am not asking for more theory. My plea is for a return to anthropology” (Ingold 2014: 393). As such, this

final section in this chapter considers what can be salvaged from anthropology. Again, following Gould's idea of positive conclusion, this work serves not just as a critique but as a suggestion.

Ryan Jobson said that anthropology is currently on fire. In 2020 he made a persuasive case to let the discipline of anthropology burn. However, Archer and Souleles argue that traditional anthropology has often overlooked the powerful, focusing instead on marginalized and less visible communities. By turning the ethnographic lens on those in positions of power, they aim to uncover the mechanisms and structures that sustain their authority and influence. This shift in focus helps to better understand the complexities of power relations, the behavior of elites, and the impact of their decisions on broader society. Archer and Souleles emphasize the importance of this perspective for a more comprehensive and critical analysis of social hierarchies and power imbalances. In the introduction to "Ethnographies of Power and the Powerful," Archer and Souleles question the outcomes of this type of disciplinary rejection, asking: "Are the structures of power that define contemporary anthropology degraded by a fire, or are they strengthened, like iron in a forge?" (Archer and Souleles 2021: 201). Does a complete rejection of the discipline simply buttress anthropological tradition?

Instead of forsaking an entire field, Paulette Steeves posited in 2015 a type of pyro-epistemology which "draws on a metaphor of the controlled burn techniques that are a key element of Indigenous land management" (Archer and Souleles 2021: 201). In contrast to Jobson's discussion of the wildfires ravaging California and anthropology, pyro-epistemology is a type of controlled burn of a discipline. While wildfires are uncontrollable, in contrast controlled burns "follow context-specific rules regarding when and where to set fires, in order to facilitate the growth not only of new trees and grasses,

but to attract game animals and other participants in cultural, economic, and political life” (Archer and Souleles 2021: 201). Steeves describes pyro-epistemology as an Indigenous practice which “cleanses the academic landscape of discussions that misinform worldviews and fuel misunderstanding and racism. Such literary renewal clears the way for new discussions and intellectual growth in academic fields of thought and centers of knowledge production” (Steeves 2015: 62).

For this work, let’s consider what a controlled burn of the discipline might entail. As it stands, anthropological material culture theory has not been fully mobilized to counter dispossession (i.e. mobilized against itself). From the 1960s to the 1980s, new theories of power and domination (such as those by Foucault and Said) emerged alongside a crisis of representation for anthropology (Asad 1973, Trouillot 2003). Anthropology attempted to critically reflect on the limits of understanding or describing the lived experiences of other people particularly from a specifically scientific epistemic standpoint, and in turn the disciplinary focus shifted to domination and resistance (Archer and Souleles 2021). Joel Robbins’ concept of the “suffering subject” in anthropology marks this shift from studying cultural differences and exotic practices to focusing on individuals’ experiences of suffering and hardship. In “Beyond the Suffering Subject: Toward an Anthropology of the Good” from 2013, Robbins suggests that this anthropological approach highlights how contemporary anthropology often centers on people facing war, poverty, disease, and displacement, emphasizing their lived experiences and emotional states. Robbins argues that this shift reflects a growing concern with ethical and moral dimensions within the field. However, despite this disciplinary focus on power and anthropology’s focus on the “suffering subject” (Robbins 2013), the ways in which anthropology has contributed to that suffering was occluded.

Anthropology sometimes neglects to acknowledge its role in creating the suffering and dispossession which it focuses on. However, this is a function of how anthropological theory is applied. For example, with Mauss his ideas of exchange stopped once the materials came under colonial control. This is the *occlusive dispossessive*, wherein the scope is obscured. Here, we see Mauss use Pacific gift-exchange theory to model social relations yet does not apply that theory to the material extraction that he is engaging with. Strathern too writes of the relations of domination (1988) but does not seem to apply it to extracted materials. However, it is clear that the application of theory is the real issue at hand, as the inverse occurs with object biographies, gift-to-god systems, and Malangan decay wherein the theory functions as *inclusive dispossessive*; the violent collection becomes a naturalized process in the flow of materials. We can look back to Küchler and how gift-to-god systems are positioned as part of the natural flow of material movements. In this sense, the ultimate appropriation occurs because these external cultural processes are appropriated into the (fictional) universal general.

However, a type of reorientation of anthropology has been suggested by Archer and Souleles, who have noted that anthropology may be uniquely situated to work against itself. They suggest anthropology could be used to “understand the way in which relatively small groups of people (often in the anthropologist’s home country) structure the lives of many, many more people in capitalist societies” (Archer and Souleles 2021: 197). They ask questions such as: “What might anthropology look like if it kept its attention to history and the context-specific analysis of power, but also focused on those actually exercising power?” (Archer and Souleles 2021: 197). It is in this vein that I suggest that current anthropological theories might simultaneously provide a more helpful crucible from which to create an anthropological theory of dispossession for returns.

Critically, this dissertation has used Mauss' idea of *hau* to reconsider how anthropological museums conceptualize the return of the *Akua Hulu Manu*. In Chapter Five, this dissertation also used Strathern's ideas of cutting the network to conceptualize how museums function to cut ownership. But there are also further examples of how Maussian anthropological theory can be used to understand returns. For example, Annette Weiner published *Inalienable Possessions* in 1992 and argued for a theory of keeping-while-giving, which might provide a deeper understanding of returns. Weiner drew on her extensive fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands of Papua New Guinea to introduce the concept of "inalienable possessions" in 1992, describing objects with deep cultural and personal significance that cannot be permanently given away without jeopardizing social relationships. Weiner also explored the gendered dynamics of exchange, emphasizing the crucial role of women in maintaining these possessions and influencing social ties. Her work built on Bronisław Malinowski's research in the Trobriand Islands and reflects a period when anthropologists were increasingly questioning ethnocentrism, gender bias, and the universality of Western economic models. More specifically, a key point of Weiner's 1992 work is to note that some things are actually about keeping. Weiner says that some possessions are not exchangeable, and are meant to be guarded and kept. She describes inalienable possessions as "transcendent treasures to be guarded against all the exigencies that might force their loss" (Weiner 1992: 33). Comparing exchangeable and inalienable possessions, Weiner explains:

Whereas other alienable properties are exchanged against each other, inalienable possessions are symbolic repositories of genealogies and historical events, their unique, subjective identity gives them absolute value placing them above the exchangeability of one thing for another. (Weiner 1992: 33)

Clearly, there is a deep connection to both identity and dispossession, as Weiner has emphasized that “the loss of such an inalienable possession diminishes the self and by extension, the group to which the person belongs” (Weiner 1992: 6). Though Weiner does not often detail specifically how inalienable objects can be lost, she does note that “theft, physical decay, the failure of memory, and political maneuvers are among the irrevocable forces that work to separate an inalienable possession from its owner” (Weiner 1992: 6). Weiner’s work is especially helpful as it accounts for certain power dynamics when she explains that having an inalienable possession can exert power over another group.

How might Weiner’s ideas aid in the creation of an anthropological theory of dispossession? What if the human remains in museum collections were considered as inalienable possessions? Weiner’s ideas can readily be mapped onto explorations of restitution in anthropological material culture theory. Firstly, Weiner argues that human remains are “the ultimate in inalienability” (1992: 219). To start by considering the human remains in museums as inalienable possessions is immediately reorienting. Borrowing from her work, I suggest that these human remains have been taken to museums and yet remained unalienated: their possession may have been physically transferred to the museum but the ownership has not transferred to the museum. As discussed, one of Weiner’s key examples of an inalienable possession is the British Crown Jewels; if they were given to another country, would they not remain the *British* Crown Jewels? Certainly we might see alignment with how materials in museums remain as the *Greek* marbles, or the *Australian* shields, or as *Hawaiian* human remains.

However, Weiner also warns that possession of inalienable materials can be used to display hierarchy and dominance over those whose possession has been taken. In these

scenarios, Weiner explains that possessing someone else's inalienable possession is a method for giving them authority because others desire what they have (Weiner 1992: 11). She describes how this type of ownership creates hierarchy, detailing how "ownership of these possessions makes the authentication of difference rather than the balance of equivalence the fundamental feature of exchange" (Weiner 1992: 40). This authentication of difference is about having power over a group, as "it is in the potential threat of violence and destruction [to the inalienable possession] that the power emerges, transfixed at the center of keeping-while-giving" (Weiner 1992: 41). Weiner also notes that sometime inalienable possessions "are exchanged, lost in warfare, destroyed by rivals, sold, or are unclaimed, thus undermining the ability of rulers or families to keep intact the material symbol that legitimates their rank, status, or uniqueness" (Weiner 1992: 37). In this case, the loss of an inalienable possession damages identity and displays supremacy.

Weiner's work aligns with Richards' 1993 work on the Imperial Archive, as Weiner discusses how inalienable objects can be used to create fictions, describing how "an object's origins can be disguised or relocated in someone else's genealogy" (Weiner 1992: 38). This reflects the malleability of the archive which was shown by these case studies. Using her work to consider returns, we might instead see how retaining inalienable possessions works to display hierarchy and colonial dominance. Possessing the inalienable possession of human remains creates an authentication of difference, giving the owner power because it holds the threat of destruction of the inalienable possession in question. Possessing these human remains also begets further enrichment for their owners. Weiner describes this effect, explaining how this ownership status establishes difference and begets other kinds of wealth (1992: 43). To apply this

to returns, museums in the UK are able to entice global audiences through their display of ownership of the inalienable possessions from across the empire.

Weiner's work on inalienable possession is therefore extremely helpful for understanding returns, helping to consider the power dynamics that are manifest in holding inalienable possessions. Clearly, holding inalienable objects in a museum creates an authentication of difference. However, Weiner's theories are also helpful for understanding how source communities might see attempts to reclaim inalienable possessions. As discussed, these possessions can be kept-while-given and Weiner asserts that descendent communities are bound to try to retrieve those possessions. Weiner's detailed investigation into how inalienability works says:

Some things, although given to others for a time, ultimately are inalienable possessions...Later, these inalienable possessions must be re-claimed, often by people in the next generation who had nothing to do with the original giving.
(Weiner 1992: 26)

This conceptualization is helpful for returns, wherein museums are subject to claims "often by people in the next generation who had nothing to do with the original giving" (Weiner 1992: 26). Applying these ideas might help better understand how source communities who might not be able to prove a community connection would still be bound to attempt a retrieval. Perhaps by applying ideas of keeping while giving, we can reconsider the experiences of source communities who are forced to prove community connections through established scientific means. In "Producing Bodies," Maja Petrović examines how societal norms, institutions, and practices shape and regulate human bodies. She explores the ways in which bodies are produced, disciplined, and transformed within various social, cultural, and political contexts. Regarding claims for

return, Petrovic describes how source communities are forced to play a game of science in order to achieve a successful restitution request:

in order to vindicate their ownership over these objects or over their native land as part of their “cultural heritage”, those claiming repatriation have had to verify and authenticate their link with the past “owners” of contentious objects. In this way, ever since Aboriginal claims were legally acknowledged, their advocates have sought the participation and endorsement of experts capable of producing evidence, especially contact and postcontact archeologists, and sometimes geneticists. Nevertheless and inevitably, though, any kind of scientific interference into spaces recognised as aboriginal, carries a range of valences across a range of social, disciplinary and emotional registers... The question that obviously arises is of the potential contradiction of disavowing modern science in the museological context, while courting it as an authenticating discourse in the legal sphere. (Petrovic 2006: 66)

Petrovic describes how claimants are forced to authenticate their claims through scientific evidence. Claimant groups may reject modern science’s intrusion into their cultural spaces, yet are forced to rely on it for validation in legal contexts. In this sense, claimants are forced into certain processes. With this in mind, we might reconsider how policies demand documentation of connection. Weiner also described this reclaiming work as difficult and overwhelming, saying “the work associated with the guardianship of inalienable possession is consuming, even dangerous” (Weiner 1992: 39). Certainly this is similarly true for those seeking restitution.

As discussed, Weiner argues that human remains are “the ultimate in inalienability” (1992: 219), though clearly, humans can be alienated, objectified, and ripped from context through violence (Graeber 2011). The human remains in ethnographic museums are quite obviously alienated and objectified. However, borrowing from these key anthropological theories might provide opportunities to understand returns more deeply, as shown here through how inalienable objects actually provides a way of understanding how dispossession works against returns. This type of reorientation is possible, as we have seen with the repurposing of work from Mauss and Strathern. Anthropological work

used in this dissertation from Ahmed or Stoler have similar potential to illuminate how dispossession and returns truly function.

What other learnings can anthropology give us? Bruno Latour offers an example of agency using guns: do weapons kill people or do people kill people? The first, materialistic perspective holds that the gun functions due to the workings of its physical parts, independent of the gunman's social characteristics. In contrast, the second, sociological perspective from Latour argues that the gunman is the active agent, with the gun itself being a neutral tool that does not act on its own. Latour clarifies this interconnectedness conceptually through the idea of technical mediation (1999).

However, maybe here is the answer to Kaeppler's question: The question is whether we need to know the entire network of who, what, where and why with the gun, but with such a broken archive maybe instead it is enough to know that there was a gun. We might not know the names of these human remains, but we do know that they are not buried in the land that they lived and died in. Both tangible and intangible forms of dispossession are apparent here. Not only are materials extracted, but information is stolen. Maybe this can offer an understanding of a language and theory for restitution which truly attends to dispossession.

6.7 The Final Twist

The final twist in this narrative is that, of course, all of these theoretical interventions from anthropologists were all also extracted from the Global South. In the same way that materials were harvested, so too were intellectual ideas. Mapped back onto themselves, we see that, for example, Mauss' *hau* is directly taken from the Indigenous cultures that Mauss was complicit in colonizing. Annette Weiner's ideas of inalienability were also taken directly from Indigenous Pacific cultures in Papua New Guinea. For Strathern's

ideas on severance, she notes that the idea of social cutting comes from the very people she was studying. Strathern says that in the Melanesian culture she researches, “images of partition, extraction, severance were commonplace. But what was ‘cut’ were persons and relations themselves: person from person, relation from relation, not persons cut off from relations” (1994: 215). In some ways, she is correct: here we have seen humans cut from their own humanity.

This widespread extractivism in academia has prompted some scholars to examine its workings and propose ways to address it. In particular, Thirusa Naidu has argued that epistemic disobedience could offer a path forward. In "Epistemic Disobedience: Undoing Coloniality in Global Health Research," Naidu critiques the persistent colonial influence in global health research and argues for a shift away from Western-dominated knowledge systems. She highlights the imbalanced power dynamics between researchers from the Global North and participants from the Global South. For instance, she examines how researchers from wealthy countries often lead studies on health issues affecting marginalized populations in developing regions, extracting data and insights without sufficiently considering the local context or engaging with local researchers and communities. This extractive practice, rooted in colonial structures, perpetuates unequal relationships in the production of knowledge, with the benefits of the research flowing predominantly to institutions and researchers in the Global North. This is a similar phenomenon as seen here, wherein anthropologists extract from cultures in the global south. To counter this, Naidu advocates for epistemic disobedience, which involves challenging the hierarchical relationship between Global North and South researchers.

To counter this theft of knowledge in material culture studies, perhaps instead of a stolen land statement, we need an acknowledgement of stolen knowledge. At the Spence Lecture in 2021, Hicks suggested an acknowledgement of this extracted data. The heart of the matter is that there has been a taking, and reciprocity demands return in kind. With this in mind, we can consider the violent ways in which information is extracted from human remains. In this sense, the shocking twist of this research is to come back full circle and note that these ideas were all reaped from the Pacific. Certainly the dispossession is entangled within the entire structure. Yet the dispossession is so severe that we cannot trust our stories. However, despite this, anthropological material culture theory might still be able to provide a counter to the dispossession. Given that it was developed as a tool of extraction, we might call upon Audre Lourdes famed titular statement: “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” (Lorde 2018: 1). The question of using the master’s tools falls back to the issue that the infallibility of the sciences and the archive was shaken when they were used to create false racist narratives. More bluntly, the issue is that sciences of empire all become pseudo-sciences in their imperial fields of application (Richards 1993). In the same way that phrenology made fiction appear as fact, these anthropological tools built an unstable house for anthropology.

Instead, this dissertation has been written to provide language and theory that can intellectually grapple with restitution and returns. This research identifies dispossession in restitution case studies and considers the many ways in which anthropology might be mobilized to facilitate understanding of those cases. In this vein, this work asserts that “museums deserve loving, critical analysis” (Lubar 2017: 332). The argument of the thesis as a whole is that dispossession prevents returns within the current systems of disciplinary theory, archive, and museum: the first case study proved how returns are set

up to be unsuccessful and reposition the museum as the expert authority. The second case demonstrated how these structures are used to justify refusing to make a return and create narrative moves to innocence. The third revealed that our current systems and structures exclude most of the human remains in question from ever being returned. The analysis of these three case studies reveals that we can use anthropological material culture theory to better understand these returns. Finally, this work contributes to the understanding of how our theory can be reoriented and repurposed to account for historical power dynamics and offer new routes towards restitution, foregrounding the importance of a new anthropological voice.

In conclusion, this dissertation highlights the deep entanglement of anthropological theory with colonial extractivism, showing how foundational ideas were often appropriated from the very cultures that were subjected to exploitation. Theoretical concepts, like Mauss' *hau* or Weiner's *inalienability*, were drawn from Indigenous knowledge systems, while the discipline's methods reinforced unequal power dynamics between the Global North and South. This conclusion demonstrates how the dispossession here is both tangible and intangible dispossession. Tangible dispossession refers to the material extraction of objects, human remains, and cultural artifacts from Indigenous and colonized communities, while intangible dispossession involves the intellectual and cultural theft of knowledge, theories, and traditions. These forms of dispossession are perpetuated through archival silences, selective histories, and the application of Western frameworks to interpret non-Western cultures. The dissertation critiques how anthropological theories, such as those of Mauss and Strathern, were derived from Indigenous knowledge systems yet have often been applied in ways that exclude or erase the original cultural contexts from which they were drawn. Yet, despite these troubling origins, by acknowledging the theft of both land and knowledge,

anthropology can be mobilized to confront dispossession and work towards more ethical practices. The case studies presented illustrate how the structures of museums and archives have perpetuated both tangible and intangible dispossession. Accordingly, this research has intended to provide the groundwork of a truly anthropological theory of dispossession.

Chapter 7: The Anthropological Archive

7.1 Agnotology

This final chapter confronts how we consider the story of the archive, and the role of omissions in its creation. More specifically, it considers what it means for museums to hold human remains, even if they are re/humanized, taken off display, or recontextualized. This chapter asks questions about what kind of story human remains tell, and what it means to use omissions to create a certain story in museum archives. Titled “Agnotology,” this section is a study of willful acts of deceit in the creation of the story of colonial dominance. In this sense, this section explores exactly how the archive is broken.

The approach to this final chapter follows advice from award-winning author Maggie Nelson, who says that when she writes books, she has a “ghost book” in mind (2012). She says this “ghost book” that guides her writing and “stands behind my book, not just as its muse, but often as its literal stylistic and/or structural model” (2012: 94). Though the published book might not reference the ghost book in any way, there is another text which haunts it. What does this mean for the museum archive? What is the “ghost book” which guides the museum's inscriptions? Is the ghost book simply the story of colonial dominance, written through gaps?

There is a further significant tension in the realm of this research, as it reveals that the gaps in the archive are not the only issue at play; I am also compelled to create gaps in my own work through self-censorship. While the archive itself may have omissions that obscure parts of the story, this research often required me to exclude certain information or nuances, mirroring the archival silences. Unfortunately, this can also lead to a

distortion of the narrative. Consequently, the gaps are not limited to the archive; they extend into the research produced from it. Ultimately, recognizing that the silences in my work reflect broader issues of representation and ethics is essential in acknowledging the limitations of the research process and the narratives that emerge from it. In this vein, this section considers the historical context of imperial narratives in archives and how the ghost book of museum archives was created and why.

Of course, stories work in multiple directions. In *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* from 2009, Michael Rothberg introduces the concept of multidirectional memory, which challenges the idea that collective memories of different historical events are in competition with each other. Instead, Rothberg argues that these memories of historical events can interact, intersect, and enrich each other in productive ways. This interaction is not unidirectional and allows for a dynamic exchange where different narratives can inform and reshape each other. For example, the memory of the Holocaust can influence and be influenced by the memory of colonialism, leading to new, enriched understandings of both. Rothberg also explains how memory is a non-zero sum game and dialogic process, and that the recognition of one group's suffering does not necessarily diminishes the recognition of another's. Rather, memories can be multidirectional, mutually enriching, and capable of fostering solidarity among different groups. He also emphasizes that memory is dialogic, meaning it involves a continuous process of negotiation, interaction, and exchange between different groups. This bidirectionality allows for a richer, more inclusive approach to remembering and understanding history, challenging the notion of isolated, competitive memories. Rothberg furthers these ideas a decade later in *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*, where he expands on his earlier ideas and introduces the concept of the "implicated subject" to describe those who, while not directly responsible for or

victimized by atrocities, are nonetheless connected to them through various forms of indirect involvement, benefit, or complicity. The implicated subject refers to individuals and groups who may not have directly committed acts of violence but are implicated in systemic structures of power and inequality that enable such violence. This includes those who benefit from or are complicit in ongoing injustices.

In this sense, stories can both reveal truth as well as obscure it; we might see stories told in a eulogy as revealing a certain truth that might not have been known before death, but we might also say that if someone is lying that they are “telling stories.” In this sense, stories are powerful tools which can convey both truth and falsehood. In order to consider the stories of the anthropological museum, it is crucial to consider the historical development of how imperial archives use information to employ beneficial narratives, even if these narratives were fiction.

In order to explore this idea, this section gives a historical overview of how archives worked to maintain control of the empire and why these narratives are important to study. The archive was specifically mobilized to support the empire. In the 1800s, the expansion of the British Empire produced a vast amount of information about the colonies. Thomas Richards’ 1993 investigation into the imperial archives notes that “the administrative core of the Empire was built around knowledge-producing institutions like the British museum” (Richards 1993: 4). He describes the Victorian knowledge gathering boom, “between 1870 and 1940, during which institutions like the British Museum could not keep up with all the knowledge they were amassing, a period in history when the task of collecting and classifying knowledge increasingly fell to civil servants operating under state supervision” (Richards 1993: 11). The same is true today, where museums have more materials, documents, and information than we can handle.

Beyond the anthropological museum, a flurry of documents were being produced to try to capture information. The British Empire was producing documentation and information through local governmental offices, anthropologists, cartographers, and geographical surveys and more. This accumulation of knowledge also affected the way the British Empire exerted power in the colonies; Richards notes that it is precisely through this knowledge-gathering that the Empire controlled its colonized locations. He explains that knowledge was accumulated through invasion and occupation. In turn this knowledge was also a myth that exerted dominance of empire over its colonies. For the British Empire, “making a vast record of [the empire] using the new knowledge becomes tantamount to controlling it” (Richards 1993: 6).

Anthropological museums played a large role in this global gathering of records. Richards explains how “the British Museum traversed the British Empire, and as a political institution the museum tended to intervene forcefully in the Empire (where cultural treasures often needed to be taken by force)... the reach of the museum extended across the globe. By 1867 nine of its ten departments carried on the bulk of their work outside the walls of the museum and, like many other Victorian societies, the museum sponsored knowledge-gathering” (1993: 15). This type of work reflects the *modus operandi* of our anthropologists like Mauss at his Parisian institute which was discussed in Chapter Two.

Given this clear conceptualization of narratives in imperial contexts, let us next consider the museum as text. I now ask, what kind of narrative does the museum support? This work has considered the inscribed histories in the museum and focused almost exclusively on text. Therefore, what type of texts are these? Gérard Genette’s 1997

concept of paratexts refers to the peripheral elements that surround a literary text, such as titles, prefaces, covers, and footnotes, which play a significant role in shaping the reader's experience and interpretation of the work. Paratexts serve multiple functions, including providing contextual information, guiding interpretation, and framing reader expectations. They act as boundary markers, signaling the beginning and end of the reading experience, while also influencing the text's reception and commercial success through marketing strategies. Paratexts are dynamic and interactive, evolving over time and varying across different editions or translations of the same text. By considering paratexts alongside the core narrative, Genette's framework offers valuable insights into the complex relationship between texts and their surrounding material elements.

Genette dissected the categories of text, parsing out categories of meta text, hypertext, and paratexts. Genette's concept of paratexts highlights the importance of considering the entire textual apparatus surrounding a literary work, not just the core narrative itself, in understanding how texts are produced, circulated, and interpreted. He describes the many different types of text, emphasizing that these texts interact. For example, *Ulysses*, the hypertext, is imposed onto the hypotext of Homer's *Odyssey*. Mostly important to this work, Genette describes how paratext enables a book to be a book, by presenting an author and a title in its specific manner. However, the paratext contains its own meaning, with paratextual messages conveyed by typeface, table of contents, authors, and font. In some cases, the sender of a paratextual message is not necessarily the producer and might instead be a publisher (1997: 8). In this sense, there is much to learn from the alternate texts of anything that is inscribed. These paratexts are mutable and impermanent, but contain important information relevant to this research; Genette's use of texts is especially useful for museum documentation which has many contributors beyond a single creator and are constantly reappraised.

In this case, the many different texts interact. How does the archive give authority to certain information, simply because it is a handwritten note from a museum curator? What is the relationship between the texts of the emails of Les Jessop and the texts in the objects collection information on the PRM website? What is the relationship between the texts and the discourse? The emails between Jessop and Coote are connected to how the PRM presents their justification for refusals, as are the articles supplied by Thomas or Sculthorpe and Nugent which are connected to how the BM presents their justification for refusals. However, looking closely, the evidence points to how the texts destabilize their own authoritative voice: the museum has many unreliable “facts” such as measurements of dimension or dates and tells a story that avoids complicity and functions as a move to innocence. In this sense, the story is created and there are many indications that reveal the story to be fiction. Going back to Richards, these occlusions as related to collections create a very tangible falsehood, or as Richards says “in a very real sense, theirs was a paper empire: an empire built on a series of flimsy pretexts that were always becoming texts” (Richards 1993: 4).

These occlusions create a very real and very fictional anthropological story. There has always been a certain fiction to anthropology; Strathern reminds us that “the classifier of ethnographic collections ‘invents’ a relationship between artefact and culture. Cut out of their (living) contexts, artefacts are made to stand for abstract wholes, a Bambara mask for Bambara culture” (Strathern 1992: 58). Ultimately, the texts work together to represent fiction as fact. This research has proved that the inscriptions of the archive can be used to create fiction which masquerades as fact: in the first case study, Clement’s anthropologist persona is a fictitious fabrication as is Stockdale’s persona as an explorer instead of a hired thug; in this second case study, a new/alternative provenance history

is created with the malleable archive; in all of these cases, the fiction that some humans are not human is created when specific information is occluded in order to dehumanize entire cultures.

A lot can be learned from the manner by which these colonial tools attempt to accomplish their goals of narrative structuring. Going back to the ghost book, however, there is also a double at play. The archive exists with its doppelganger, the ghost book which tells the story of colonial dominance. To borrow from Naomi Klein's latest work, *Doppelganger: A Trip Into the Mirror World* (2023), there is a shadowy second reflection when it comes to doubles. The book begins with Klein recounting her experience of being frequently mistaken for Naomi Wolf. Wolf is also an author, known for her book *The Beauty Myth* from 1990. However, this confusion becomes more pronounced as Wolf veers into promoting COVID-19 conspiracy theories, prompting Klein to reflect on the broader implications of their "doppelganger" dynamic. Klein uses this mistaken identity to delve into how social media and digital avatars shape our perceptions and interactions. She examines the rise of conspiracy theories and political tribalism, describing a "Mirror World" where reality and fiction blur, and truth becomes subjective. Klein coined the term "diagonalism" to describe the strange alliances between far-right conspiracy theorists and certain elements of the New Age left, highlighting how both groups manipulate language and facts to suit their narratives. *Doppelganger* is both a personal memoir and a broader social critique which illustrates this idea of a dual nature. In *Time's Monster*, Priya Satia also writes of how "History has a dual nature, a split self: at once social—scientific and humanistic, materialist and metaphysical. As a narrative form, it insists on an empirical foundation but then willfully weaves imaginative truth from it—morphing into myth when fecklessly unmoored" (Satia 2020: 55). However, despite the polarity of mirrored doubles, they are still self-reflections.

In this sense, looking at these fictions can be revealing. To quote Linebaugh, there is much revealed by the idea that the archive could be manipulated to achieve its aims, “as though violence and dissent were only blemishes on Britain’s colonial past, concealable through the right rearrangement of administrative document” (Linebaugh 2022: 735). Basically, the archive can create reality. Anthropologically speaking, the implications of the redactions in the archive mean that, in the words of JG Ballard, “the fiction is already there, our job is to invent the reality” (Ballard 1973). Ballard’s statement reflects a belief that the modern world has already created a landscape that is inherently surreal and fictional and his work underscores the interconnectedness of fiction and reality. In the museum, applying this idea means to understand that the inscribed archive is fiction.

In order to explore the fictions of the archive, this work has also been forced to wander into the realm of fictions. However, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, using fiction and storytelling is not unusual for historians or anthropologists. The aims of this research align with McTague, who writes of *Things that Didn’t Happen*. McTague writes about the subjunctive and the potential tense, separating events into either 1) fabrications 2) failures or 3) speculations (2019). His work “privileges the historiographical over the historical, which is to say that it pays more attention to the methods and techniques of writing about the past than it does to the extent to which such writing corresponds to or faithfully represents past events (2019: 3). This work aims to do the same, and is similarly focused on not the counterfactual, but the counter everything, specifically: “the historiographical potentiality of things that didn’t happen, and the kinds of things that happen when people treat them as if they did” (2019: 3). In this sense, both writings are explorations into the arena of fiction. McTague explains this approach more fully:

A starting point might be to say that the difference between occurrence and non-occurrence, in these cases, is less phenomenological than it is conventional. Or, less wholeheartedly deconstructionist: this book is much more interested in the conventional aspects of that difference than the phenomenological, because of a strongly held belief that there is no unmediated access to the phenomena of the past. If that is the case, it seems prudent to concentrate on the mediation itself: not “did this happen (and how, why, etcetera)?” but “what does it mean for someone to have said that it didn’t (or did)?” (2019: 7–8)

In this vein, this dissertation has focused on what is missing and why, rather than attempting to reconstruct a redacted history. To borrow from McTague, this work is more concerned about what happens as a result of how things-that-didn’t-happen are accepted as non-fiction. As the redactions are the focal point, this work must consider fiction as something more sinister: lies and secrets. Despite the fictions of the archive, the presence of lies does not indicate that the story told by the archive is useless. In fact, according to White, “such lies and errors enabled historians to understand the overarching patterns and pathologies of colonial rule” (White 2000: 13). Perhaps we can look to Maggie Nelson again and consider precisely why the sensitive and fleshy “red parts” are hidden (2017). What do these occlusions illustrate? Accordingly, we might look to events like *Operation Legacy*, wherein the British Colonial Office removed and destroyed documents which showed the scale of violence and dehumanization that was used on the colonies.

For twenty years, the British Colonial Office instituted the *Operation Legacy* program to curate a narrative that was beneficial to the empire. Specifically, on September 4 in 1947, the governor of Ceylon sent a telegram to London requesting guidance on how to handle the custody of sensitive documents. Ceylon was about to become independent and a new government would be instituted, but the British governor, Henry Moore, was worried that some documents would destabilize the transition. As noted by the historian Shohei Sato in 2017, Moore was an experienced colonial administrator and had trained

at Cambridge (2017: 700). He was aware that the evidence in the archive would not represent the empire in a favorable light. Accordingly, the origins of *Operation Legacy* began to take shape. In the coming decades, archival evidence of British atrocities such as “systemic use of torture in detention camps” would be burned or secretly relocated (Linebaugh 2022: 731). Sato describes this program as “one of the most spectacular destructions of historical records known in our time” (2017: 698), and details how trucks full of evidence were sent to be destroyed in the Royal Navy Base incinerators (2017: 704).

The primary objective of what would later be called *Operation Legacy* was to hide what one colonial officer called “the dirt of the colonial days” (Sato 2017: 708–709 quoting Watson to Cheyne, 7 July 1962, document red-130, FCO 141/18409). As the title suggests, the legacy of the British Empire depended on the obfuscation of this evidence. Clearly, the documents would reveal that the empire was violent and dehumanizing; the goal of this program was to prevent the tarnishing of the empire’s reputation and prevent what they called “embarrassment.” Sato describes the “paranoia” (Sato 2017: 710) of this scheme, noting that this operation specifically excluded anyone who wasn’t a white European, even if they were citizens in service of the British colonial offices or local authorities (Sato 2017: 707). During the twenty years that the program functioned, it was important that none of the other colonies found out. At the Library and Records Department of the FCO, the official position was that the entire operation must remain secret because it was still in progress, saying: “The system of removal of sensitive material prior to independence is still in effect and we would not wish the present colonial territories to become aware of the fact” (2022: 746).

Operation Legacy was therefore extremely successful in their destruction of the documents, but also in their ability to hide the destruction. Sato questions precisely why and how “such a large quantity of documents [was] left unnoticed for such a long time?” (2017: 698). In Ceylon it had been impossible for the new government to tell that their archive had been amputated and redacted. Sato notes that:

One of the earliest Ceylon government reports on the archive referred to the “unembellished pedigree” of the collection, covering “eight miles of foot-run of shelving”—but it did not mention that things were missing. (Sato 2017: 701)

This aligns with what we have seen throughout this work. It is very clearly the sensitive “red parts” which have been removed from the inscribed archive, but it is difficult to notice that they are missing because the redactions are buried within a wealth of documentation. In Erskine Childers’ 1903 espionage novel *The Riddle of the Sands: A Record of Secret Service*, two friends embark on a sailing trip along the German North Sea coast. As they navigate the intricate channels and sandbanks, they stumble upon evidence of a German plot to invade England. In the novel, records and documentation are no help to the two explorers. For them, “maps obliterate rather than indicate position, impede rather than facilitate movement...Even the act of taking bearings causes vertigo” (Richards 1993: 127/128). Similarly, the archival information used for restitution requests is unreliable; the documents obliterate rather than indicate position, impede rather than facilitate movement. The new Ceylon government had been prevented from seeing that the violence and dehumanization was missing, because it was hidden in eight miles of shelving. Just like in *Little Dorrit*’s Circumlocution Office, Dickens is not just disheartened with the incompetence of the office, but is preoccupied with the reach and scale of the office:

It was this spirit of national efficiency in the Circumlocution Office that had gradually led to its having something to do with everything. Mechanics, natural philosophers, soldiers, sailors, petitioners, memorialists, people with grievances, people who wanted to prevent grievances, people who wanted to redress

grievances, jobbing people, jobbed people, people who couldn't get rewarded for merit, and people who couldn't get punished for demerit, were all indiscriminately tucked up under the foolscap paper of the Circumlocution Office. (1857: 98)

The Circumlocution Office is a testament to the outcome of having so much information that it becomes impossible to contain, maintain, or use. This same phenomenon is reflected in Chapter Five, where the wealth of information provided by the archive nonetheless had none of the information to enable a return or re/humanization. Ultimately, the plentiful archive still redacted information that indicated the violence of the colonial experience.

This type of archival destruction was not specific to the British Empire. In *Displaced Archives*, Hiribarren writes of similar initiatives undertaken by the French and Belgians (2017). What we learn from these "migrated" archives is that the narratives of empire are both fiction and fragile. Despite the mass documentation of information and plentiful records, the colonial archive is ultimately a fiction. However, the key to these fictions lies in the manner by which the archive masquerades as complete, which is seen in the new Ceylon government's reaction to their redacted archive. Richards describes how the positioning of imperial archives as total ultimately ends in malicious fiction. He argues that in imperial contexts, scientific disciplines often turn into pseudo-sciences and the knowledge developed at the European center becomes distorted when applied to the colonies. Richards notes that the methods and techniques used to build scientific knowledge in Europe transform into tools for creating myths in the colonies and that this distortion can be so extreme that what was once considered scientific knowledge becomes pure myth, such as when physiognomy morphed into racist phrenology.

Given this understanding of the fiction of empire, how to anthropologically learn from this? The contribution of this work is not an attempt to follow on Trouillot's *Silencing* (1995). Trouillot outlined the idea of "silencing" as a historiographical concept involving the active erasure of histories not in alignment with the prevailing narratives of supremacy and conquest. His work more aptly applies to the original redactions in the archive which fit into the typological classifications identified in the case studies. However, on the contrary, the cumulation of these redactions is not a silencing but instead a masquerade where fiction is presented as fact. Understanding this requires understanding the historical context of the imperial archive:

The Victorian contribution was simply to reformulate this project as explicitly imperial and redeploy the stock imagery of Romanticism to serve the end and aims of Empire. The legacy of Romanticism was the residual conviction most Victorians shared that all knowledge, despite its modular character, should and would be united. Knowledge was expanding rapidly, but so were the means to contain it. The peculiarly Victorian confidence that knowledge could be controlled and controlling, that knowledge could be exploding and yet be harnessed as the ultimate form of power, issued from this felt merger of the Victorian project of positive knowledge with the Romantic project of comprehensive knowledge. The merger of these two projects made possible the fantasy of an imperial archive in which the control of Empire hinges on a British monopoly over knowledge. (Richards 1993: 7)

In sum, the legacy of Romanticism combined with the imperial directive of the Victorian era has concocted a fiction of a complete archive, which the British Empire mobilized in order to wield control over its colonies. Richards explains the conceptualization of the imperial archive as a fantasy, explaining that the imperial archive positioned itself as universal. This fantasy of a complete archive controlled by the British was how the British retained power. It is because of these fantasies and fictions that the archive is broken.

Paulette Steeves explains in *Decolonizing the Past and Present of the Western Hemisphere (The Americas)* how archaeology privileges a fiction wherein the first peoples to populate the Americas were said to have traveled across the Bering Land

Bridge (2015). This idea, called the Clovis First Hypothesis, is the story told by the imperial archives. Steeves details how evidence for earlier migrations is ignored in order to privilege the comfortable fictions of archaeology, arguing that the “vast body of evidence for much earlier migrations which is ignored a priori mainly due to embedded “nonfactual” colonially constructed histories which erased an ancient Indigenous presence” (Steeves 2015: 42). These agnotologies exist and have been studied by Byrd (2009) and Bryan (1986), but specifically studying this gap reveals much about the dispossession at hand. What does it mean to privilege one story over another? This work has followed McTague and historian Luisa White to consider what these redactions can illuminate about the narratives of empire. As White says:

Lies and secrets are explanations about the past that are negotiated for specific audiences, for specific ends. Secrecy and lies conceal, they camouflage, but they certainly don't hide everything...Secrets and lies signal that what has been declared secret, what has been deemed worthy of a lie or a cover story, is more significant than other stories and other ways of telling. (White 2000:14)

More plainly, understanding what was a secret, or what was lied about, illustrates the priorities of colonial domination. Looking at the typology of redactions which is offered by this research, we can see clearly that colonial domination required dehumanization and keeping violence a secret. This is the main goal of the colonial archive. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (formerly the British Colonial Office) stated in the 2011 Cary Report that *Operation Legacy* was an accident and was the product of insufficient archival practices. This is clearly inaccurate and was false, but indicates how important narrative control is to empire still today. As Linebaugh notes below, this archival control is no accident:

Narrative control was at the core of Britain's “end of empire” political strategy. Focused on avoiding embarrassment, which was determined according to the success of anticolonial resistance and the ways it laid bare both the hypocrisies and fragilities of the British Empire, the Colonial Office embraced secrecy and propaganda in an attempt to reassure the hearts and minds of Parliament, British

voters, and the international order that the nation and its empire were not slipping from supremacy. (2022: 733)

To this day, *Operation Legacy*'s "migrated archives" are kept hidden, despite their relative visibility since 2011. We are reminded that this is because colonialism "challenges the empire's claims to a morally just political system" (Hiribarren 2017). This connection identifies the moves to innocence at work in the inscribed museum: the fiction is about creating distance between the narrative of empire and the dehumanizing violence of empire. Luise White argued that history must understand itself to be a fiction and says:

Isn't the point of intelligence and counterintelligence, of information and disinformation, that no single story can be made to stick, that there is no one version of events that can stand without contest or contradiction? (White 2000:14)

Certainly we can see alignment between the disinformation of the archive and the assertions of provenance researchers in these case studies. We might see a reflection of this idea from Thomas and Nugent, to Hartman, Cooper, and Fuentes, who all agree that the archive cannot deliver the infallible non-fiction story that museum policies so adamantly demand. This counterintelligence is maneuvered in the archive. The contribution here is to identify that not only does the inscribed museum fail to deliver fact, but that the fictions are used to prevent returns. Reconsidering these two seemingly incommensurable stories of provenance history explored for the wicker head in Chapter Five, we might instead look to the stipulations imposed by the discipline. We might look at Kaeppler's questioning of definitive provenance differently given an understanding of the instability of the archive.

The Victorian invention of the imperial archive is the reason that the word "classified" went from being considered as a taxonomy to delineating knowledge placed under the

special jurisdiction of the state (Richards 1993). To be “classified” now often means that knowledge is removed from public access. In this dissertation, taxonomy became a matter of true classification. In the exploration of agnotology within the context of museum archives and colonial narratives, a profound revelation emerges: the archive, touted as a repository of truth, is inherently a construction of fiction. This section delves deep into the mechanisms by which narratives of colonial dominance are shaped and perpetuated through occlusion. By scrutinizing historical contexts, particularly the imperial archives’ role in perpetuating narratives of supremacy, this inquiry uncovers the intricate interplay between fiction and reality within the archive. The British Empire’s meticulous curation of knowledge, epitomized by initiatives like *Operation Legacy*, underscores the deliberate suppression of truths deemed inconvenient to colonial hegemony. Yet, amidst the sea of redactions and omissions lies a poignant truth: the gaps in the archive serve as windows into the priorities and machinations of colonial control.

This inquiry reframes the discourse surrounding provenance history and the reliability of archival data and challenges the notion of an infallible narrative and prompts a reevaluation of how we confront historical lies and fictions within anthropological discourse and museum practices. We might instead ask: “What are the canons of evidence for what is untrue? What’s the historical method for things that never happened? How do we arrive at a chronology and why would we want to?” (White 2000: 13). How can anthropology and the museum confront lies? In France, “they sandblasted the names of colonial heroes off the side of the old École coloniale set up near the Luxembourg Gardens in the 1980s” (Aldrich 2013: 4). Do we also wish to use a sandblaster to address these issues? Do we leave false texts with a strikethrough? In the 1980s, a PRM curator covered up a racist term on a label with correction fluid (Image

G). Do we completely obliterate its existence in *damnatio memoriae*? What are the inverses or alternatives of a redaction?



Image G: PRM website, “Object label with racist language covered over with Tippex in the 1980s” (<https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/labelling-matters>)

7.2 The Mass Graves of British Museums

In 2003, The Scoping Survey of Historic Human Remains in English Museums was undertaken on behalf of the Ministerial Working Group on Human Remains. They reported that they estimated at least 61,000 human remains held by museums in the UK. About half of the surveyed museums in the UK do not have significant holdings of human remains, with less than 50 human remains in their collections. However, about 20% of those museums hold massive collections of human remains, reporting over 500 in their museums.

For almost 30% of these museums, their collections of human remains are mostly in storage. Storage is the status quo. As discussed, to choose to put things away in storage is to align with biological race scientists who hope for a similar outcome: that

more testing might be done in the future. So how to imagine museums otherwise? For example, the idea of “care” in museums and caring for the dead is an urgent example of what this actually means in practice. This positioning counters the historical model which prioritized display and research and moved instead towards narratives of care and caring for the dead in museums which revolve around the ethical, respectful, and culturally sensitive handling, display, and repatriation of human remains. In a 2020 book called *The Museum as a Space of Social Care*, Nuala Morse explores the evolving role of museums beyond traditional functions of preservation and exhibition. Morse suggests that museums have the potential to serve as spaces of social care, where they actively engage with visitors and communities to address social issues and promote well-being. At the PRM, the Taking Care Project and the Matters of Care Conference organised in conjunction with this initiative look at positioning ethnographic and world cultures museums as spaces of care. This prioritization of care is a response in praxis to the issues of human remains. However, this next section proposes an even more physical response to human remains in museums.

Human remains have been used to create a fiction, and so we must do something to counter these fictions. Returns can counter this, but there are so many human remains which are in the category of “unreturnable” due to a lack of information. The answer to this for many might be to try to rehumanize, to recontextualize, or to try to put everything away in storage and hope that later testing might provide more answers. My argument is that this is unsatisfactory. This analysis has shown how returns are unsatisfactory, or refused, or impossible. Rehumanization is near impossible and perhaps less than ideal as an aim. Removal from display and the mere presence in the museum is also insufficient. And now, even reinterpretation is inadequate. So what can be done *now*? Patrick Williams defines postcoloniality as “not in any sense an achieved condition, but

[...] an anticipatory discourse, looking forward to a better and as yet unrealized world.”

In keeping with this ethos, this research now makes some suggestions. In this section, I suggest looking at how museums have historically approached victims of mass violence. As such, this research now indulges in speculative fiction. What options remain? What is the inverse of Tuck and Yang’s move to innocence? In “Race and Our Biocentric Belief System: An Interview With Sylvia Wynter,” Wynter describes how these moves to innocence are structural:

So the question that we have been running away from is the body of knowledge in the university and schools itself. It is not any other extraneous factor. It is the body of knowledge. It is the system of representation. When people have struggled, asking, “Why is there no Black history?” This is not arbitrary. This is indispensable to the instituting of our present bourgeois conception of being human. So, we are all accomplices. We are all in complicity. We can’t come up with a “good-guy bad-guy.” We are necessarily in complicity with the order in which we find ourselves. But also, as intellectuals, remember, we are social, but we also have a vocational interest. And so, the Faustian temptation will always drive us, hopefully, to go beyond the immediacy of what would be our social interest in continuing to know the world adaptively. Because we want to say, “Oh that’s how it works.” (King 2005: 365–366).

For Wynter, it is critical to acknowledge the body of knowledge within educational institutions, particularly the absence of Black history, as essential for perpetuating the prevailing bourgeois conception of humanity. Wynter calls for the acknowledgement of the responsibility of academia, particularly universities and schools, in perpetuating certain knowledge systems and representations that uphold existing power structures. However, this does not mean that taking responsibility is a matter of simply stating it. In the 1990’s, anthropology suggested reflexivity as the solution to this epistemic crisis. The anti-racism push of the “decolonizing generation” of the 1990s (Watkins 2018: 29) sparked this movement. However, this resulted in reflexive absolution from material change. Following this reflexive surge, Tuck and Yang published *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor* to critique this surge in reflexivity, noting that a more material approach is needed. In Deetz’s book *In Small Things Forgotten*, he highlights the importance of

using inventory lists for knowledge construction in archaeology. If we are to consider the archive-as-subject or the archive-as-process, perhaps the same type of attention is needed to consider our inventory lists. Building on this, I suggest looking to probate. How do we deal with materials post-death? If we are truly post-colonialism then it's time to divide the assets. This is the radical redistribution of resources which decolonization movements championed. It is not a metaphor. As discussed in Chapter Two, to change our discipline, something material must change.

There have been some attempts to make material changes in the form of physical monuments. Some countries have instituted material sites of mourning. In Canada, physical sites of memorial which address missing victims exist across the country. These public sites of remembrance are helpfully collated online by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Fund. The website explains that the memorials “honor the lives and legacies of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.” For example, the Strength and Remembrance Pole in North Vancouver was carved by a local artist and “is meant to serve as a spiritual beacon for the victims... but also to give a place for them to come together and find strength and comfort” (“Monuments Honouring MMIWG”, 2023). There are monuments to missing victims around the world, including the Cambrai Memorial to the Missing in France, The Ploegsteert Memorial to the Missing in Belgium, and The West Coast Memorial to the Missing of World War II in the United States. There are many memorials that achieve their purpose while dedicated to anonymous victims and do not require the elusive provenance histories which museums make to be mandatory.

Further, memorials to the victims of colonialism already exist. In Mali and Burkina Faso, large stones were erected with the words dedicating itself to the martyrs and victims of

colonialism, reading: “aux martyrs et victimes du colonialisme.” This type of monumental anti-colonial heritage has been explored by Aldrich who argues that

Perhaps inevitably, colonialist celebration is simply upended to become a celebration of anti-colonialism, each certain of its veracity and, ironically, bearing many of the same tropes: heroic language, central locations, nationalist focus, imposing imagery, and the grandeur of the constructions” (2013:10).

Many anti-colonial memorialization projects aim to create a museum space, such as the 2001 *Mémorial national de la France d’Outre-Mer* cultural space in Marseilles which never materialized (Kleppinger 2020). However, I am not suggesting further commemorative monuments with heroic language, but a site of mourning. In this vein, I propose a shift away from museums and statues to sites of grief and loss. To clarify, this research does not suggest another museum or another statue; I am instead suggesting that human remains do not belong in museums. We need a gravesite.

Dan Hicks has suggested that some aspects of British Imperialism in Africa can be considered as World War Zero. He argues that many of the tactics of the world wars were tested in Africa, making clear comparisons between the warfare used in both events. To borrow from Hicks’ work, if we consider British colonial rule in the Pacific as a similar event, we see victims. These victims of British colonial rule in the Pacific are still at museums in England. When we consider world wars, we give the victims memorials and burials. There is a huge amount of literature and study devoted to how we memorialize victims of many types of social injustice. For example, memorials to the victims of the Holocaust publicly commemorate the unknown dead. Let us therefore consider a suggestion for treating the unknown dead the same way we treat the dead of the World Wars. These victims are given physical mass graves and the narrative surrounding these unknown humans addresses the grief, their dispossession, and their victimhood. Might this materiality provide a counter to the empire’s moves to innocence?

This suggestion that UK anthropological museums must consider burials does not fall into the same vein as Penn Museum's recent actions to bury the human remains of 13 people who were exhumed from local gravesites. This suggestion applies to only the human remains discussed in this chapter, namely, human remains that cannot be identified. While the human remains in the Penn Museum case are identifiable and further initiatives to consider the futures of those remains can be considered with input and consultation from their communities, this case study is about the futures of the human remains that do not even have documented countries of origin.

There is much already written about how post-conflict memorialization can be achieved (Viejo Rose 2011, 2013). However, this specific memorialization process has been denied to the victims who are in museums. Judith Butler, a philosopher and gender theorist, introduced the concept of "grievability" in her 2009 work *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* This book explores how societies value different lives and the implications of this valuation for mourning, politics, and ethics. Butler argues that not all lives are perceived as equally valuable or worthy of mourning by societies and media. For Butler, the notion of grievability is a measure of whose lives are publicly recognized as valuable and whose deaths are acknowledged as a significant loss. Lives that are deemed grievable are those that fit within the framework of what society considers a "livable" life. In contrast, lives that fall outside of these social norms—often marginalized, oppressed, or dehumanized groups—are seen as less valuable, and their deaths may not provoke public grief or mourning. Butler's argument centers on how social and political structures determine whose lives are recognized as worthy of protection and whose deaths are rendered invisible or acceptable. This differentiation is often influenced by factors like race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and socio-economic status.

For example, Butler points out that media representation and political discourse often frame the lives of those in Western, affluent societies as more grievable compared to the lives of those in war-torn, impoverished, or occupied regions.

Grievability is crucial because it shapes not only how we mourn but also how we understand and respond to violence, injustice, and war. When certain lives are not grievable, their suffering and death can be more easily justified, ignored, or even supported by those in power. This lack of grievability can lead to a normalization of violence against certain groups and a lack of accountability for those responsible for this violence. Butler's concept challenges us to think critically about our ethical responsibilities and the biases inherent in our grief. It calls for a more inclusive understanding of humanity that recognizes the dignity and value of all lives. By expanding our sense of grievability, Butler argues, we can foster a more just and equitable society, where the loss of any life is seen as significant and worthy of mourning.

Borrowing from Butler and Hicks, we might see how the human remains in museums have been denied grievability. However, what would it mean to allow these human remains to be grieved for? As collections are transferred and sorted into categories, the disciplines define themselves. This material enactment allows for a unique opportunity to change our disciplines by moving collections. This begs the question: what if we change anthropological material culture to exclude human remains? What happens to anthropological theory when we move human remains out of museums and into gravesites of public memorialization and grievability? If moves to innocence are about absolving the complicit from responsibility, how might anthropology instead shoulder their responsibility? A gap has opened between what has been done and what should be

done. Perhaps this gap is the emptiness wherein debt lays. Given that a move to innocence is characterized by an evasion of responsibility, the opposite of this would be to retain full responsibility. If a mass grave and a memorial site to the victims of colonialism is designated in the UK, it would serve as a powerful acknowledgment of historical injustices and a tangible step towards material redistribution. By providing a dignified resting place for those whose lives were taken under colonial rule, such a site would challenge the narratives of erasure and dispossession perpetuated by the museum's display of human remains. Moreover, it would symbolize a shift towards accountability and responsibility within the field of anthropology, moving away from reflexive absolution towards tangible action.

In Bernard Knox's article 'the Medea of Euripides', he writes that "the Medea is not about woman's rights; it is about woman's wrongs, those done to her and by her" (1977: 211). In many ways, a similar theme applies to these colonial collections. It is less a story about Indigenous rights, and more a story about the wrongs done to them. As such, this proposal does not simply advocate for the relocation of human remains; it calls for a fundamental reevaluation of the ethical and moral implications of anthropological practices. It challenges us to confront the legacy of colonialism and its ongoing impact, demanding a more just and equitable approach to the treatment of human remains. In doing so it opens up new possibilities for reconciliation, both within the discipline of anthropology and in society at large. The article by Bertie Russell titled "Beyond activism/academia: militant research and the radical climate and climate justice movement(s)" from 2015 examines the relationship between academic research and activism within the context of climate justice movements. Russell advocates for a form of militant research that actively engages with social movements to produce knowledge that is both practically useful for activists and critical from an academic perspective. He

critiques the traditional divide between academia and activism, arguing that this separation limits the potential for meaningful social change. In many ways, this work follows the style of militant research, in that it is research which “becomes the art of producing tools you can fight with” (Russell 2015: 222). As such, this next section will make further suggestions to how the redactions in the archive can be confronted.

7.3 The Anthropological Voice

Finally, another positive conclusion to this work is the suggestion that the problem of human remains might also be confronted through a shift in the anthropological voice. This dissertation contributes to the understanding that if the archive is broken, so too is the anthropological voice. This argument has been made through the form of this dissertation, as somewhere midway through these chapters there is a distinct change in authorial voice. Somewhere midway through this work, both author and reader realize that the archive is broken. The reliability of the archive becomes increasingly and obviously fallible, and the author’s voice reflects this realization. While the first few chapters of this dissertation function with standard academic voice with a confident focus on names and dates and facts, somewhere in these chapters, that voice falters. Suddenly there are no more names and dates and facts, only possible narratives. As such, the voice changes too, shifting towards storytelling and the speculative. I began to fight against the voice I was trained to write with; the confident factual approach was no use here. However, this tonal shift is a reinvention of anthropological tradition; it is both new and old.

The voice and storytelling is at the heart of anthropology. Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* from 1922 is ultimately a story. Even Alfred Kroeber was using experimental storytelling in the early 1900s in his anthropological work (and that was well

before his daughter the famous fantasy author Ursula K. LeGuin was born). Books like *Ishi in Two Worlds* by Kroeber's wife, Theodora, used storytelling to frame Kroeber's research within narratives. Further, James Deetz' work in historical archaeology such as his book *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* from 1977 also used stories to understand the archaeological record. For recent scholars interested in fabulation such as Sadiya Hartman, the story is critical despite being fabulated.

Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography by James Clifford and George Marcus from 1986 critically examines the practices and conventions of ethnographic writing and the broader implications of how cultures are represented. Most importantly for this work, Clifford and Marcus explore the literary aspects of ethnography and posit ethnographic writing as a form of literary production. This involves analyzing the narrative techniques, tropes, and rhetorical strategies used in ethnographic texts. In a response to this book, Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon published *Women Writing Culture* which offered the feminist response to Clifford and Marcus, emphasizing the need for including women's stories and perspectives. They argued that the conventional narrative structures that often silence or marginalize women's experiences. Traditionally, our field has often asked questions about *whose* voice tells stories.

Ultimately, this focus on story is not a departure from anthropological tradition, as the four fields approach sees the discipline of anthropology as a compilation of archaeology, physical anthropology, cultural anthropology and linguistics. At the crux of this lies linguistics. Even our archives are a series of texts. As such, attention to the story and the voice are crucial. In this work, the storytelling voice has a progression. We began with an academic overview of the field, in the forensic historical voice; passive and factual; names and dates. Yet, when the archival evidence is so thin, is this type of storytelling

still appropriate? The authoritative voice of Chapter Two does not work so well when dealing with the speculative in Chapter Six.

As this work progressed, I began to cite fictional literature instead of academic writing, moving towards the realm of imagining, drawing on works by Charles Dickens, Erskine Childers, and even Phillip Pullman. As the story in this dissertation is revealed, this author's voice reflects that the archive has betrayed us; it is not whole, complete, static, or infallible. This work sees a voice that moves from confident and factual in the literature context and first case study, to one that is uncomfortable and betrayed. Instead, we move into a realm where the factual confident academic voice is undermined. It cannot function here and we must instead move into the literary. In the previous chapter, I noted that the language in this dissertation moved away from calling museological human remains "objects" and instead refers to "subjects." However, as discussed, this is not a breaking with anthropological tradition; it is the anthropological tradition renewed. The process of this research led to this work's epiphany that a new anthropological voice is needed for human remains.

More specifically, this new anthropological voice is needed because of the tension between facts and data and the right to privacy in death. Namely, in modern day we expect a certain amount of privacy and anonymity. Sarah Tarlow addresses this in her 2011 book *Ritual, Belief and the Dead in Early Modern Britain and Ireland*. The book explores the various aspects of mortuary practices and their cultural and social significance during the early modern period in Britain and Ireland. Addressing the ethical considerations surrounding the excavation and study of human remains, she argues that individuals have a right to privacy even after death and that this privacy helps to ensure

that the dignity of the deceased is respected. However, the anthropological voice cannot deliver any privacy in this sense as it relies on exposing names and dates.

This tension between the traditional academic voice and modern understandings of the right to privacy in death were illustrated in 2023 when Erin Thompson published a spreadsheet listing information about the 12,000 human remains held in the American Museum of Natural History in New York (Thompson 2023). This type of list of human remains seems to align with the traditional anthropological voice, in that it is a factual list of names and dates and descriptive information. This list was a response to the limited information about the AMNH collections. However, there was significant criticism of this type of list. Danika Parikh from the University of Sussex wrote that she didn't think that a "data dump was the right way forward" (Parikh 2023). Others wrote about the ethical concerns involved in this type of inventory of human remains, commenting: "Isn't there an ethical dilemma in revealing this data openly like this through social media? It's essential to call out the horrific practices of museums around human remains but what's the actual approach behind sharing it in this way?" (CP 2023). Another wrote that "Treating dead people as data points isn't really better than what the museum is doing, no matter why you're claiming to do it. It's just more dehumanization" (Porter 2023). This tension between needing this information to be available and the fact that inventories can create dehumanized data points was articulated by many who noted that "I do think it is important to use research expertise to provide information to descendant communities. But I hope you will also engage with some of the criticism here about this particular method of reproducing these violent records, especially from descendants" (DeAngelis 2023). The issue seems to be that reproducing violent records or reducing human remains to data points is insufficient, yet this information is still critical for restitution work.

Certainly it is unacceptable that there is no survey or list of the human remains in UK museums. As noted by Howard Morphy in an email to the PRM in 2002, “I think it would be quite wrong for the Pitt Rivers Museum or any other museum to restrict information about the nature of its collections, how otherwise can people reclaim their connections with them?” (Coote 2002; Appendix E). More plainly, this information is needed to facilitate requests. As discussed in Chapter 6 names and dates can both dehumanize and rehumanize. It is due to this tension that a new anthropological voice is needed.

There is a tension here as this definitive curatorial list is vital, yet there might also be other ways to write about it other than as evidence. Sarah Tarlow raises these same questions, looking at gravestones in Orkney to argue that these grave markers may not be evidence, but instead very personal objects of sadness and mourning. In her 1999 book, *Bereavement and Commemoration: An Archaeology of Mortality*, Tarlow suggests that the historical voice of naming with facts and data might not be appropriate when confronting death. She argues that “we should be moving towards writing archaeologies of emotion and experience” (Tarlow 1999: 19) and that “a failure to consider emotions in the past, especially in a work ostensibly related to death and dying, would be an injustice to the people who erected these monuments” (Tarlow 1999: 21). In this sense, anthropology may need to move away from its current anthropological voice in order to confront human remains in collections. Again, if the archive is broken, then so too is the anthropological and curatorial voice.

For the tens of thousands of dead in British museums, there is no hope for return because of the lack of information documented by this dissertation. Returning to Howard Morphy’s question from his 2002 email to the PRM, without this type of information, “how

otherwise can people reclaim their connections with [human remains]?" (Coote 2002). A new audit is needed, but as seen from the response to Erin Thompson's inventory, this audit must be undertaken in a new way. This information is needed, but in a way which does not reproduce humans as data points. It is possible that these speculative narratives (as seen in anthropology from Deetz to Hartman) might provide a path towards a new anthropological voice which can address the tension surrounding how museums require this information without violating rights to privacy in death or becoming a data dump which dehumanizes human remains into data points.

The final contribution of this dissertation is therefore to question how we continually attempt to answer Kaeppler's question with a false archive. Given that the archive is broken, a new anthropological voice is needed to contend with this. In this sense, creative storytelling might aid in this goal. This dissertation challenges the reliance on conventional archives, advocating for the incorporation of storytelling to confront the limitations of existing narratives. As discussed in the previous chapter, without the redacted data, the story always remains the same, even when told in a different way. However, creative and speculative approaches, such as critical fabulation, can offer a departure away from the broken and redacted archive. These new and creative approaches to storytelling have been attempted by scholars such as Saidiya Hartmann in her use of critical fabulation. There is a role for emotionally informed anthropology. These ideas are reflected by current anthropological work such as in Zachary Levenson and Josh Seim's article "Cracking the Iron Ceiling: On Ethnography as Theory" from 2024. Levenson and Seim explore the vital role of ethnography not just as a research method, but as a significant theoretical framework within the social sciences. They introduce the concept of the "iron ceiling," which symbolizes the barriers that inhibit the integration of ethnographic insights into mainstream theoretical discourse. This metaphor

captures the systemic obstacles that prevent ethnographic work from being recognized as a legitimate source of theoretical innovation. He suggests that these barriers arise from a historical preference for more quantitative, generalized forms of research that often prioritize abstraction over nuanced, localized understanding. Consequently, ethnographic work, which is inherently detailed and often grounded in specific cultural contexts, can be marginalized or dismissed as anecdotal. By advocating for ethnography as a source of theory, he emphasizes that ethnography is not merely about collecting data but involves a deep engagement with the subjects and contexts being studied.

Emotionally informed narratives can be critical for how we construct and remember history. In an interview, Jorge Luis Borges, an Argentine writer and poet, discusses his thoughts on literature, philosophy, and the purpose of art. He says that “the task of art is to transform what is continuously happening to us, to transform all these things into symbols, into music, into something which can last in man’s memory” (Burgin and Borges, 1969: 25). This reflects Borges’s belief in the power of art to give lasting meaning to human experiences by turning them into symbols and memorable forms, such as music and stories. For the purpose of this work, this idea reflects how art and creative narratives can be powerful tools for understanding history. Using literature to understand our world can be transformative. For example, in “Progress versus Utopia, or, Can we imagine the future?” Frederic Jameson reflects on the role that science fiction plays in shaping our perception of the present and future. Jameson is concerned with how cultural forms (such as literature, art, and media) represent or obscure the totality of social relations. He believes that in a capitalist society, culture plays a role in both reflecting and masking the contradictions of capitalism. He writes that science fiction’s “multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come” (1982: 152). In essence, Jameson is

saying that science fiction does not just give us visions of possible futures; it forces us to reframe our understanding of the present. By showing us mock futures, it makes us see today as something that will eventually be the past. This encourages a critical reflection on how the present is shaping the future, helping us understand our own time in historical terms. More broadly, stories are not just about escapism or fantasy—they serve a deeper function of revealing the trajectories of our current world. Blair Worden’s book review of *The Noble Revolt: The Overthrow of Charles I* by John Adamson in the London Review of Books from 2007 discusses the interplay of power, politics, and narrative and importantly notes that “narrative has another function, for which academic training provides no preparation: the recovery of the atmospheric pressure of events, which, to be understood, has to be not merely thought about but felt” (2007: 6). The data of the archive is unreliable, but narrative might instead provide this other function of deep understanding. In line with Tarlow’s suggestion, these new types of stories prioritize emotion and lived experience. These stories must not be thought, but felt.

However, I argue that these new stories and this new voice might not provide the cathartic ending that we expect from most stories. We can look back again to the work of Becky Cooper in *We Keep the Dead Close: A Murder At Harvard And A Half Century Of Silence*. In her investigation into the murder of Jane Britton, she writes of how many were shocked by the apparent conclusion of the case: A DNA match had been made to identify Britton’s murderer, but it didn’t seem to make sense. The DNA testing had identified a random stranger as the murderer, a seemingly incontrovertible fact which did not align with other information in the case. The circumstantial evidence had indicated a ritualistic red ochre burial and indicated that the killer knew his victim intimately. Thus, what happens when scientific data is unreliable? In the case of the Gweagal shield at the BM, scientific testing was used to determine the origins of the wood that the shield was

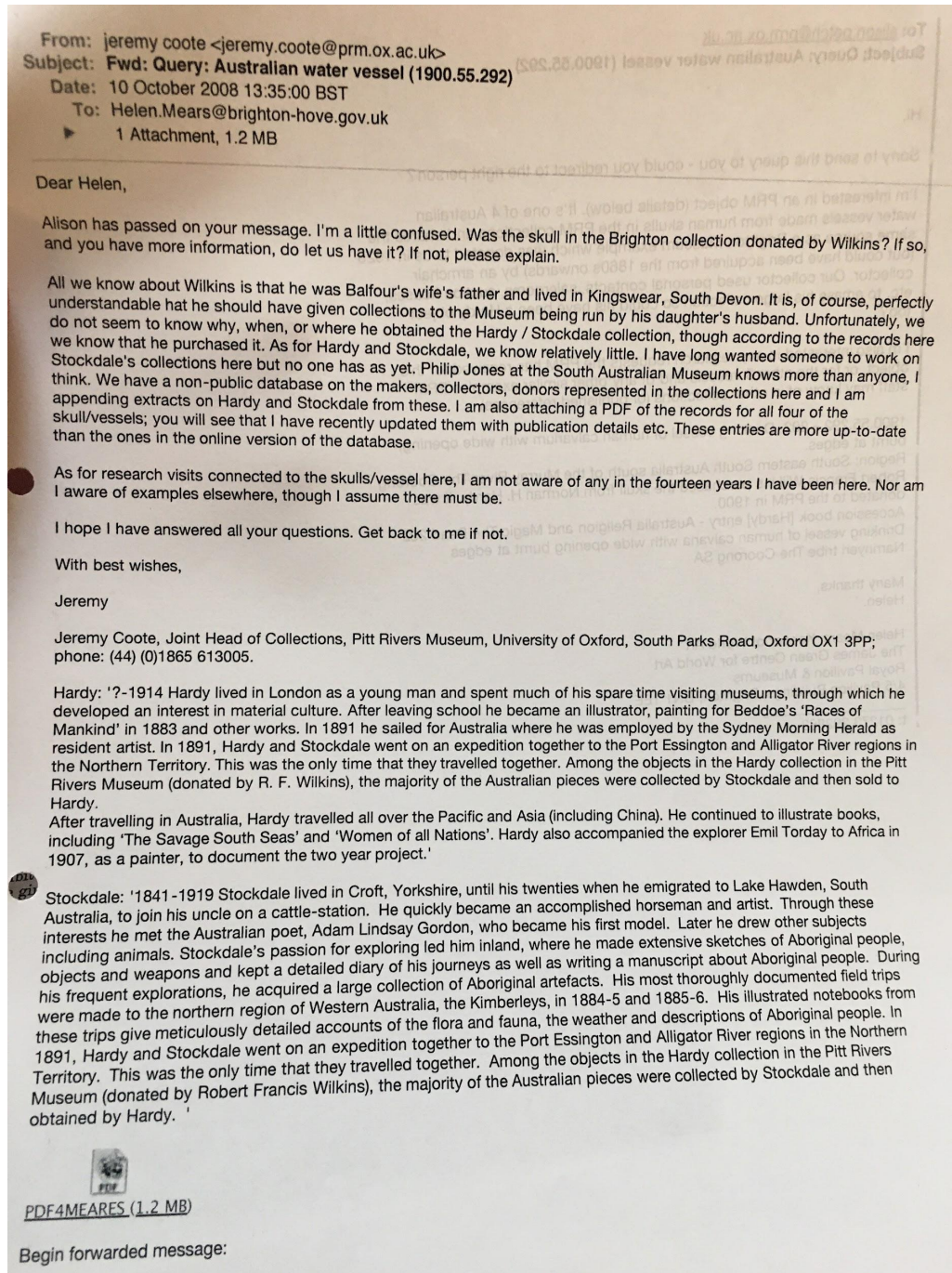
made from. The tests determined that the wood came from too far away from Botany Bay for it to have been collected there by Cook. However, as discussed, to some scholars this new information did not exclude the shield from having been collected at Botany Bay, and could even be explained by trade routes. Sometimes the data does not match the story. For Becky Cooper, the result and story produced by DNA tests and the scientific data did not provide a reasonable conclusion. The concrete evidence didn't seem to match the story of Britton's murder at all and left many people unsatisfied. She was forced to become comfortable with not knowing.

In a similar way, by using storytelling to address human remains, we might instead be forced to confront the discomfiting reality that the stories needed to contend with dispossession may not offer the closure or resolution typically sought in traditional narratives. In conclusion, this dissertation suggests the need for a new anthropological voice, one that moves beyond the limitations of the traditional archive and embraces creative storytelling. As this work demonstrates, anthropology must reconcile the tension between the need for historical data and the ethical concerns surrounding privacy in death. While lists and inventories are essential for restitution, they risk dehumanizing the individuals they catalog. Instead, this dissertation advocates for a renewed anthropological voice that embraces narrative, acknowledges the limitations of scientific certainty, and is comfortable with ambiguity. Ultimately, this work underscores that confronting the brokenness of the archive requires both a reinvention of tradition and a willingness to sit with unresolved, often uncomfortable truths. These are ultimately unsettling stories about extreme violence. It is likely that the stories needed to contend with human remains will be unsatisfying. "It's like a Hercule Poirot story with a postmodern ending," Becky Cooper writes, "where Poirot combs through suspect after

suspect only to discover on the last page: ‘It was a brick. Sorry guys.’” (Cooper 2020: 381). And ultimately, we do know what happened. Latour already told us. It was the gun.

Appendices

Appendix A: Coote, J. (2008) Email to Helen Mears. October 10 2008. Pitt Rivers Museum Related Document Files. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.



Appendix B: Eeley, S. (1990) Letter from Stephen Eeley. June 18 1990. Pitt Rivers Museum Related Document Files. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

Prof. G.A. Harrison
cc. Dr T.S. Kemp
Ms J.W. Pickering

Return of skeletal material by PRM.

I note that Dr Schuyler-Jones has agreed to return Australian Aboriginal skeletal material from his collections to interested parties. I recall that at the last meeting of CSCUM on 24 April 1990 (minute 852.5), Dr Jones reported that a request for the return of material had been made but that he would discuss the matter further at the meeting of the University's museums' curators. It was also agreed but not minuted that Dr Jones would not act on his own in this matter as the implications of one museum returning collections were considerable.

Dr Kennedy, who was at the last meeting of the University's museums' curators has no recollection of a policy decision being taken on this matter. Do you know if there was discussion during the last meeting of the Committee for the Pitt Rivers Museum?

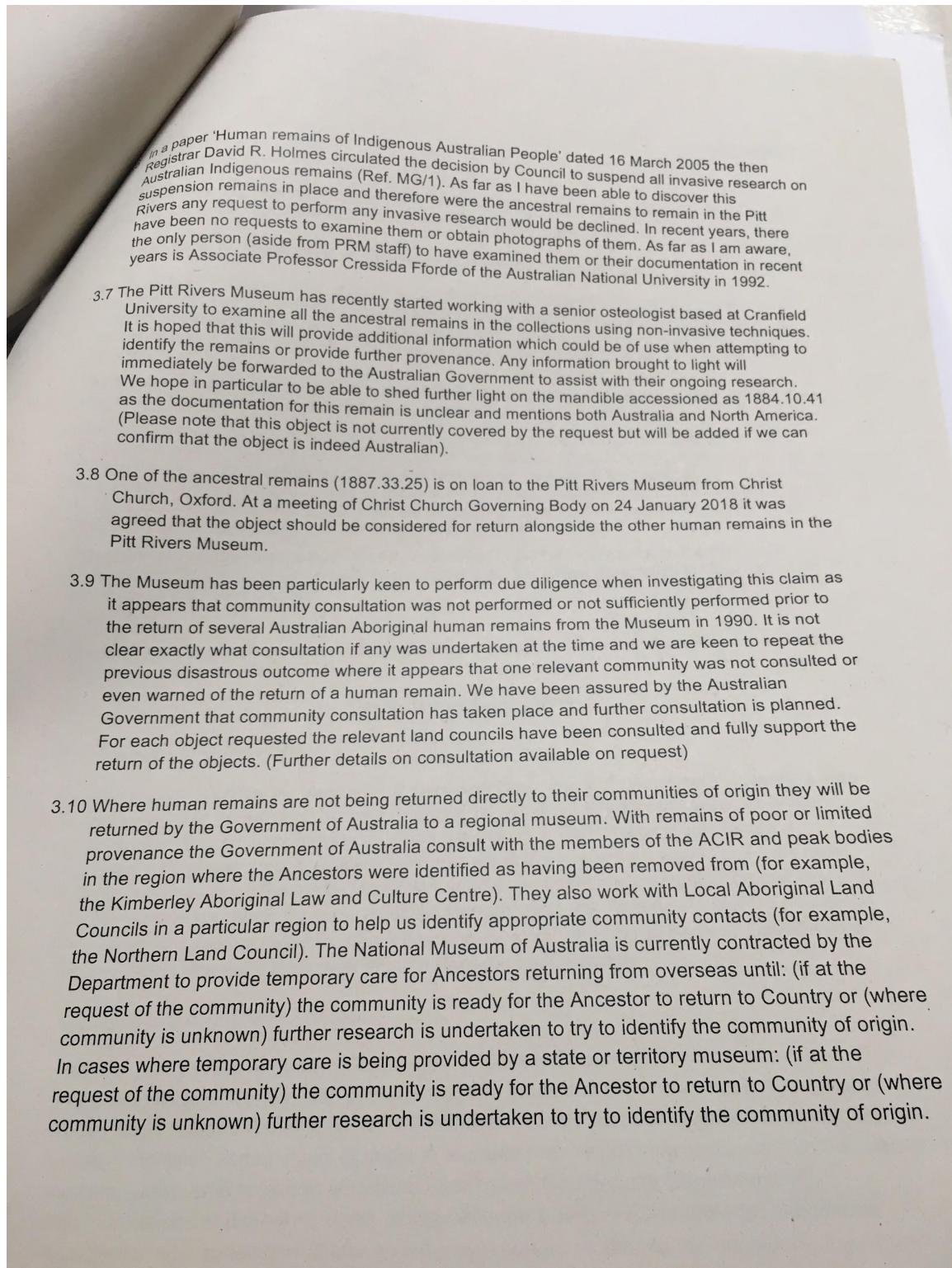
I am concerned that the OUM should understand what its position is in the light of the recent developments and know how to act should an approach be made.

SEE

Stephen Eeley

18 June 1990

Appendix C: De Alarcón, M. (2019) Summary of Repatriation Request for Australian Aboriginal Ancestral Remains from the Pitt Rivers Museum. Pitt Rivers Museum Related Document Files. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.



Appendix D: Coote, J. (2004) Email to Mike O'Hanlon. August 16 2004. Pitt Rivers Museum Related Document Files. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

From: jeremy coote <jeremy.coote@prm.ox.ac.uk>
Date: Mon Aug 16, 2004 12:07:42 PM Europe/London
To: Mike O'Hanlon <michael.ohanlon@pitt-rivers-museum.oxford.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: [Fwd: Repatriation of Indigenous Australian Remains]

Dear Mike,

To deal with the Counsellor's specific questions first:

When the five skulls and penis were repatriated in 1990, the skeleton (and some other cranial material) could not be found and it was presumed that it had probably gone to the Natural History Museum in London to which material was transferred from Comparative Anatomy some years before. When the skeleton (1921.72.1) was located in 1993, Skye wrote to Dr Luke Taylor at the National Museum of Australia on 11 March 1993. He explained: (a) that the skeleton had been found, (b) that 'we are prepared to return the skeleton to Australia'; and (c) seeking advice on how this might be done. Luke Taylor responded on 30 March 1993, saying he had passed the letter to Mr Michael Davis of ATSIC. Roger Dobb of ATSIC (Manager, Environmental and Heritage Section) wrote on 6 September 1993 explaining interim policy developments and concluding that 'based on these interim policy positions, ATSIC is currently ascertaining what the wishes of the local Aboriginal community are as to what should happen to the skeletal material recently found in your museum'. He went on to say that he would keep Skye 'informed of the results of these consultations, and of the procedures involved in its return to the local community'. No further communications were received or sent.

As for the second question, I am not sure how this can be answered. Some other non-artefactual apparently Australian Aboriginal skeletal material has been found in recent years (because of excellent collections management work) and this falls into the same category as that repatriated in 1990 (and the skeleton). However, most of this additional material is poorly provenanced, which everyone now agrees makes repatriation difficult if not impossible. To help you in answering that second question, however, I have produced a revised list of all the Australian Aboriginal material held by the Museum that has been identified as comprising or being made of (wholly or in part) human remains (including bones, hair, and teeth). A copy will be in your pigeon-hole later today. Let me know if you want more details or more advice on this point.

As for the question you asked on the phone, i.e. was the skeleton on an agreed list at the time of the 1990 repatriation? Well, Yes and No. It is now easy to forget that the decision was not taken by Council, whom Skye merely asked to note that the decision had been made, but by Skye himself (with the 'concurrence' of the Committee for the PRM). He based his decision on: (1) the policy (which, so far as I am aware, is still in force) drawn up by a curatorial meeting and endorsed by the Committee for the PRM; and (2) the University Statutes, which gave the Director authority to dispose of material 'irrelevant' to the collections. Arguably, there were two decisions: (1) to repatriate such material in general if asked for it by the relevant group, or their representatives; and (2) to hand over the particular items that were handed over. The skeleton, and arguably all non-artefactual skeletal material in the Museum's collections, falls into decision 1. Clearly, however, the situation has changed somewhat in the last ten years. This can either be seen as unwonted centralization (with the PRM losing some of its power to act) or as sensible coordination of the University's collections. As I understand it, not everyone within the University was happy with Skye acting alone, as it were. No doubt, you would now wish any request for the repatriation of the skeleton (or anything else) to be approved by: (1) P&P, (2) the Visitors; and (3) the University (i.e. Council).

I think that is all I can put in an email. Let me know if you want to discuss this further. I am putting the list of material still held here in the internal mail, along with photocopies of the 1993 correspondence and of the relevant documents from 1990.

Jeremy

Jeremy Coote, Joint Head of Collections (Africa and Oceania), Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PP; phone: (44) (0)1865 274720; fax: (44) (0)1865 270943.

For the Museum's website, go to < <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk> >. For the Museum's online searchable databases go to < <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/databases> >. For the Museum's notes for visiting researchers, go to < <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/researchnotes.html> >. For the Forster Collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum go to < <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/forster> >.

Appendix E: Coote, J. (2002) Email to Howard Morphy. March 1 2002. Pitt Rivers Museum Related Document Files. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

Accession 112 III 26

Howard Morphy, 3/1/02 10:32 am +0000, Re: Fwd: 1

To: Howard Morphy <Howard.Morphy@anu.edu.au>
From: Jeremy Coote <jeremy.coote@prm.ox.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: Fwd:
Cc:
Bcc:
X-Attachments:

Dear Howie,

Thanks. Quite agree. If only there was a really good source to refer people to ...

J

Dear Jemery,

thank you for your Christmas note. it is interesting how in all my years of work in Eastern and Southern Arnhem land no Yolngu has ever expressed any concern about the issue of human remains!! it is also something that rarely is discussed in Australia, this may be partly because one view has become the dominant politically correct view and with it an associated series of myths about bones being associated with the soul. The issue is very much one associated with the nature of colonial experience and the horrendous massacres and ill treatment of people in Tasmania and much of the rest of Australia quite rightly give bones an enormous emotional significance. I think it would be quite wrong for the Pitt Rivers Museum or any other museum to restrict information about the nature of its collections, how otherwise can people reclaim their connections with them?

Happy Christmas and much love to you and Lujia and the Cootlings

Howard

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