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Chapter XX

Inside the Human Remains Store: The Impact of Repatriation on Museum Practice in the United Kingdom

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Introduction

In October 2013, five organisations in England, Guernsey and Ireland returned Māori remains to the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Although these returns represent the latest in a number of repatriations of non-European human remains from museums and institutions in the United Kingdom, repatriation continues to be the subject of debate within the museum community, as demonstrated by the British Museum's recent rejection of a claim to two Torres Strait Islander skulls (McKinney 2014), and calls for the Museum Association to review its policy on repatriation (Harris 2013). In the UK, the literature on repatriation was initially focused around discussions about whether remains should be returned or not, a debate in which human remains often became framed as being either as 'objects to study or ancestors to bury' (Hubert 2003, unpaginated; see also Besterman 2004; Teague 2007). In more recent work, the ways human remains are conceptualised by different museums has been examined, mainly through the lens of institutional polices on human remains and repatriation, and how they have been applied to claims for return (Di Domenico 2015; Harris 2015). While building on this work, I also want to try to move past the focus on policies to explore the impact of repatriation on the conceptualisation of human remains within UK museums and the practices of those who work with them. I do so by drawing on interview data with staff at the Royal College of Surgeons of England, the Natural History Museum,

Oxford University Museum of Natural History, Manchester Museum, and The British Museum, along with field diary notes that document my ethnographic observations and own experience of working with the human remains collections at the Royal College of Surgeons of England.[2]

Putting the Repatriation Debate in Context

The current approach to repatriation requests can be seen as the culmination of thirty years of extensive discussion around human remains held in UK museum collections.[3] Although the future of all human remains collections has been debated, it has been the human remains of Indigenous Peoples collected within a colonial context that have been viewed as the most controversial due to the imbalance of power that allowed remains to be taken without consent and against the wishes of the community (see Fforde 2004). Because of this controversial history, when requests for repatriation began to be made to UK museums by indigenous campaign groups, such as the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, support came from within certain sections of the museum community who argued that amends should be made for the harm inflicted by colonial collecting practices (Hubert 1989). The arguments being made for repatriation from within UK museums need to be viewed within the context of a wider shift in museum practice that had begun in the 1970s when the Enlightenment model of the museum as a space of cultural authority that communicated 'truth' started to be challenged (Harrison 2005: Coffee 2008; Bennett 1995). As McCall and Gray (2014: 20) explain, the consequence of holding curatorship as 'central to the museum exercise' was that a narrow social group claimed exclusivity, defining the role of museums and how other cultures and peoples were categorised, studied, and displayed, constructing an identity for the 'other' that often had no reference to how living populations saw themselves (Turnbull 1991; Zimmerman 1989). By the 1970s museums had begun to be accused of being isolated from

the modern world, elitist and obsolete, and arguments began to made for the sharing of museum authority through engaging with community representation (Hooper-Greenhill 1992: Macdonald and Fyfe 1996; Moore 1997; Vergo 1989; Gorman 2011). By the 2000s nationally funded and local authority museums were being framed as 'agents of social change' as part of a wider strategy for social inclusion (McCall and Gray 2014: 22). Jenkins (2011) has argued it was these shifts in thinking, along with the ideas adopted from the politics of regret, that allowed repatriation claims to gain purchase in UK museums.[4] However, I would suggest that repatriation should not just be seen as an outcome of changes in museum practice in the UK, but as a contributing factor.

In *Collecting the Dead* (2004), Cressida Fforde's research on the biographies of Aboriginal ancestral remains held in museums, she reveals the complex gift exchange network through which the remains moved. In researching these complex and entangled post-mortem biographies, different versions and meanings begin to emerge, opening out histories and making 'salient what might otherwise remain obscure' (Kopytoff 1986: 67). Therefore, the research into the histories of museum collections that repatriation requests prompted resulted in a foregrounding of historical narratives that fed into the discussions around social, cultural, religious, and human rights and how to deal with legacies of colonial collecting practices (Gorman 2011; McCall and Gray 2014; Carter and Orange 2012). As Barkan (2003: 96) argues, this global discourse empowered those who had been situated as 'other' and also challenged the 'contemporary nation state's self-perception as a just society'. Following the recommendations made in the *Cultural Property: Return and Illicit Trade* report, and the political statement in 2000 by the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and Australia, in which it was agreed that efforts to repatriate remains to Australian Indigenous communities should be increased, a Working Group on Human Remains was established, tasked with

examining the issues around human remains held within collections of publically funded museums and galleries in the UK (Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) 2003: 1.1).[5] The issues considered by the Working Group reflected the questions being raised around colonial collecting practices, consent, and the display of the dead in exhibitions such as *Body Worlds* (see Jagger, Dubek and Pedretti 2012). The issue of consent had also been foregrounded by the controversy that followed the revelations that children's body parts had been retained by surgeons at the Royal Liverpool Children's National Health Service Trust and Bristol Royal Infirmary.[6] This retention of organs without the proper consent caused a large-scale public outcry and in 2001, the same year as the Working Group on Human Remains was established, the Retained Organs Commission was set up to examine practices related to the donation and retention of human tissue. Seen within this context, it becomes clear that in the UK repatriation debates both influenced and became entangled in the shifting ethical and cultural attitudes within wider society: a 'moral flux' that created a climate of sensitivity around human remains (Hendry 2004).

The *Report of the Working Group of Human Remains*, published in 2003, endorsed the repatriation of Indigenous human remains wherever possible, acknowledging that a number of British institutions had already agreed to return remains (DCMS 2003: 1.4). The work of the Retained Organs Commission resulted in the 2004 Human Tissue Act that gave the nine national museums the power to de-accession human remains under 1000 years old, something those museums had previously argued was prohibited under the 1963 British Museum Act.[7] In 2005 the Department of Culture, Media and Sport published guidance on how to approach the issues surrounding the holding of human remains by museums in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This non-statutory guidance defines human remains as 'the bodies, and

parts of bodies, of once living people' and includes modified remains used in the creation of artefacts (DCMS 2005: 9).[8]

By considering the wider context of the repatriation debates in the UK, what emerges is that human remains collections within museums are socially situated and entangled. Therefore, to explore the impacts of repatriation, I will first consider how engaging with a more diverse range of views has influenced the conceptualisation of human remains within museum collections, before turning to examine how this has influenced practice.

Returning Ancestral Remains

In September 2011, Edward Ayau from the Hawaiian group Hui Mālama I Nā Kūpuna O Hawai'i Nei visited the Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCS) to collect an ancestral skull. Having removed the skull from the store, Head of Conservation Martyn Cooke repacked it in a new box and then placed it in the room were the hand-over ceremony would take place. However, once Edward Ayau arrived, it became clear to Cooke that it would now be inappropriate for him to continue handling the box (M. Cooke, personal communication 11 December 2014). One reading of this event would be that prior to the ceremony the skull, once part of a living person, was objectified and dissociated; in the process of becoming a specimen, identity and personhood had been stripped away (Alberti 2011; Lock 2002), but that through the process of repatriation the skull once again became 'social' and thought of as an ancestor. However, what this linear biography does not allow us to take into account is that for Edward Ayau, the skull was always an ancestor and that for native Hawaiians the proper treatment for kūpuna (ancestors) is essential for maintaining spiritual health:

> The whole point of this work is to restore them to the existence that their families
> wanted for them. So in Hawaiian the world is kanu, and kanu means to plant, so the

same word for to plant a tree is used to bury a person, same word because the idea is

you're planting something into the ground and that the result of that planting is

growth. […] So in respect of the human body what grows from that is mana, and

mana, it's a Polynesian phenomenon, but for Hawaiians mana means like spiritual

power, spiritual essence, so a person who has charisma, in Hawaiian they would say

they had mana. And so the idea is that the planting of the bones infuses the land with

mana so that the land will produce food because not only do the bones become

fertilises for food but what's also important is for the succeeding generations to know

that the ancestors are where they're supposed to be in terms of sense of place and so

when they're not there then the order of things has been disturbed. (Interview with

Edward Ayau, Hui Mālama I Nā Kūpuna O Hawai'i Nei, 15 May 2015)

So while a linear biography can reveal how the meanings and values of this ancestral skull

have changed over time depending on sociological and historical context, as Dan Hicks

(2010) points out, the limitation of this approach is that the meaning in a particular moment

can become fixed. This is problematic when dealing with human remains as it leads back into

the 'ancestors or objects' dichotomy the framed the repatriation debates in the UK and does

not reflect the multiple and shifting meanings human remains can embody.[9] The instability of

the boundaries that separate subjects from objects has become a topic of debate across the

social sciences (see Pels, Hetherington and Vandenberghe 2002), encouraging efforts towards

engaging with materiality as a means of working with ambiguous aspects of material

presence and combinations of life and matter (Mol 2002; Anderson and Wylie 2009; Dudley

2010). Rather than being the point at which the skull once again' became social', viewed

through this lens the repatriation can be understood as a shift in which meanings and whose

authority were dominant. What is also evident is the physical presence of the skull itself, as

by avoiding handling the skull the museum staff were able to demonstrate their respect for Edward Ayau, highlighting the relationship between the physicality of remains, respect and performance.

The concept of the repatriation being the point at which the skull became social again is also problematic as it suggests museum collections are not embedded within on-going webs of social meaning. Therefore, in trying to understand the impacts of repatriation it is important to acknowledge that museums are complex cultural, social, and political landscapes. As Samuel Alberti (2005: 571) argues, rather than being mausoleums for objects, museums should be seen instead as conduits for relationships involving those objects. In examining the different ways museums in the UK have approached repatriation, a picture of the museum as an idiosyncratic institution shaped by people and collections emerges. In recalling his experience of dealing with the Royal College of Surgeons of England, Edward Ayau spoke about cherishing that particular repatriation as the process had been transparent and the discussions very respectful, the opposite of what he had expected:

> …when we found out the remains were there and I consulted with people whose opinions I value, they all told me get ready for the fight of your life, the last thing in the world that was going to happen was that the Royal College of Surgeons would repatriate human remains! (Interview with Edward Ayau, Hui Mālama I Nā Kūpuna O Hawai'i Nei, 15 May 2015)

In fact, the College Council at Royal College of Surgeons had agreed to change its Acquisitions and Disposals policy in 2001 to allow for the repatriation of ancestral remains to Australia, New Zealand and America, with the first repatriation to the Tasmanian Aboriginal

Centre taking place in April 2002.[10] Under the previous policy the College would only consider requests for return from close relatives who could provide legal evidence of the relationship, so the change reflects a shift in how the claimants' relationship to the remains was considered. A shift that the President at the time of the first repatriation, Sir Peter Morris, suggests his personal experiences of meeting and working with Aboriginal people in Australia allowed him to influence:

> As I said my first reaction in Council when I heard these discussions, they'd talk about scientific value, which I thought was probably a load of rubbish, but anyway they were completely ignorant of the history of the Aboriginal Australians, how they were treated in the early days, how many of the specimens were probably obtained, yes particularly the heads. (Interview with Sir Peter Morris, 18 December 2014)

What this example foregrounds is the human agency responsible for the creation and application of institutional policy. Those involved are social actors moving between the institution and outside society, a process Di Domenico (2015: 301) explains as micro-level individual processes feeding into macro-level institutional process. In this example, Sir Peter Morris's personal experiences, and the understanding of another society he had gained from those experiences, fed into the development of policy at the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

However, as Cassman, Odegaard and Powell (2006: 21) point out, how human remains are categorised in museum policies is also influenced by the wider collections. At the Royal College of Surgeons of England, there were concerns about demands being made for European remains within the collections to be returned or buried, particularly the remains of

Charles Byrne.[11] Another notable example is the statement in the British Museum's policy on human remains that 'the Trustees consider that the public interest is strongly in favour of the retention in the Collection of human remains that have been modified for a purpose other than mortuary practice' (The British Museum 2013: 5.13). So, although the British Museum has returned some human remains such as the ash bundles that were repatriated to Tasmania in 2006 (British Museum 2006), the request made for the return of seven Toi moko (tattooed and mummified heads) to New Zealand and two human skulls to Tasmania was refused (British Museum 2008).[12] In the Torres Strait case, the 'Trustees implied that the active participation of the Islanders in exchanges with the collector, Haddon, may have influenced their decision against repatriation' (McKinney 2014: 41). While McKinney (2014) suggests that the British Museum tried to balance the collectors' accounts of exchanges with the customary practices of the time, the meanings that the remains may hold for the present community appear to have been outweighed by the meanings they supposedly held in the past. Yet, as Te Herekiekie Herewini, Kaiwhakahaere Kaupapa Pūtere Kōiwi (Repatriation Manager) at Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa explains:

> …the earliest remains that went overseas were the mummified heads, the Toi moko that were traded and so Māori were active in the trading of those ancestors. What I see is that there is a growing understanding of Māori today that those ancestors are quite important to us. So their heads may have been taken and traded overseas by the enemy but when they come home they actually belong to us, the family of origin. And because we don't necessarily know who exactly the family of origin is there's becoming a growing understanding that they actually belong to all of us as Māori. And so a special place may need to be put aside for them as well because they're our fallen warriors. (Interview with Te Herekiekie Herewini, Te Papa Tongarewa, 5 June 2015)

So, although repatriation requests may foreground the social, cultural, and religious importance of ancestral remains and their relationship to issues of human rights, colonialism, and sovereignty, the authority to decide which meanings are dominant continues to reside with the museum (and see XX, this volume).

The British Museum's refusal to return human remains it categorises as 'modified', can be seen as an attempt to protect the other areas of its collection from claims for return, the most high-profile case being the request from the Greek Government for the return of the Parthenon Marbles (Fouseki 2014). This suggests that the categorisation of human remains collections within museum policies is partially due to museums thinking politically about threats to their wider collections, indicating how the repatriation of human remains is linked to wider discussions around the restitution of cultural heritage. However, to further explore the concept of respectful treatment we need to move past policy and examine practice.

Practicing Respectful Treatment

In the *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museum*s (DCMS 2005) human remains are framed as having 'unique status' within museum collections; the fact the remains were once part of a living person makes them categorically different to other objects and deserving of respect. All of the museum staff I spoke to agreed that human remains are a part of the collection that requires careful consideration due to the potential cultural sensitivities, with the need to respect alternative views and beliefs and treat remains with respect and dignity being consistently articulated.[13] But despite being found in many museum policies (for example Manchester Museum 2013; The British Museum 2013; University of Oxford 2006), the concept of respectful treatment of human remains is not well defined, which is perhaps

not surprising given that respect for the dead is culturally constructed and context dependent. This tension between differing views of respectful treatment can be seen in the previously discussed refusal of the British Museum to return ancestral remains to New Zealand. So although the museum staff may feel that they are treating these remains with 'care, respect and dignity' (Antoine 2014: 3), for the Indigenous claimants the retention of these remains is not respectful of either their views or their ancestors (Atkinson 2010: 15).

> But then they don't understand that from the Māori point of view, and this is where it goes back to a deep spiritual understanding, is for Māori that these are our ancestors no matter what. From 1769 when the first ancestor, or 1770 when the first ancestor left it doesn't mean we lost our connection to them, the connection to them is still here and it's alive within us today. So it may take over two hundred years or three hundred years for the ancestor to come home but we, we still want them home. (Interview with Te Herekiekie Herewini, Te Papa Tongarewa, 5 June 2015)

For sociologist Tiffany Jenkins, these tensions around respectful treatment and the agreement of some museums to repatriate human remains is the result of an 'underlying crisis of cultural authority' caused by the internal questioning of the authority of the museum and the museum professional (Jenkins 2011: 78). However, although agreeing with Jenkins that repatriation has contributed to the problematisation of human remains collections within UK museums, Hedley Swain (2013) argues that the issue has been overcomplicated, as repatriation is simply about human rights.[14] Research into museum practice by McCall and Grey (2014) indicates that, with human remains and the wider social inclusion agenda, UK museums have been left to find their own route in linking ideology to practice, raising the question of how the concept of respectful treatment is performed within museums.

When asked to define respectful treatment, the museum staff I interviewed all admitted it was a difficult and elusive concept, but in practical terms felt it was demonstrated through high standards of collections care — although this should not be taken to mean that there have been major changes in the care of human remains, or that high standards of care are not applied to other parts of the collection. In the *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* (DCMS 2005), the recommended standards of collections care are set out, linking the concept of respect with a set of particular professional practices. Section 2.6 of the guidelines states: 'museums with collections of human remains of significant size should create a dedicated storage area in order to provide the best possible conditions' and it is this recommendation that had arguably had the most noticeable impact on how human remains collections are stored in UK museums. However, in looking at how this concept has been applied, we again see the idiosyncratic nature of museums. Within some museums, the human remains collections had always been separate due to the way the collection was categorised. For example, at the Natural History Museum, human remains are a category within a natural history collection so were stored together as part of the zoology collections.[15] For institutions that hold archaeology and ethnographic collections, such as Manchester Museum, human remains were often stored with other material from a particular site, culture or region, and so creating separate storage areas was a notable change in practice. Nonetheless, when asked about the storage of human remains at Manchester Museum, Bryan Sitch, Deputy Head of Collection and Curator of Archaeology, highlighted the issue of space faced by many museums:

> Because of demands on storage space I think […] institutions have to find their own pragmatic way of dealing with this. I think they should be together, whether it's always possible to separate them off in their own separate room is going to be

difficult for some institutions. Sometimes, simply having them in the same set of

shelving in a room, you know that can be sufficient. (Interview with Bryan Sitch,

Manchester Museum, 6 January 2015)

As this comment makes clear, it is not always possible for museums to have a separate

storage space for human remains collections, but, as a minimum, they should be kept on

'designated shelves away from the main activity of the store' (DCMS 2005: 17). This

indicates that the positioning of human remains away from general activities or busy areas of

the store has become understood as a physical demonstration of respectful treatment.

However, this is not to say that separation is always unproblematic. A concern for staff at the

Royal College of Surgeons of England has been that the original Hunterian collection is

based on comparative anatomy, so some specimens consist of human and animal tissue

mounted together in order to demonstrate difference. Although, as former Curator Simon

Chaplin explained when asked about this issue, the storage should not be considered

disrespectful within this particular context; 'the idea that you'd impose some kind of arbitrary

separation given that the collection was arranged as such that in many cases human and

animal remains were part of a series would have actually diminished the value of seeing the

collection as a whole' (S. Chaplin, personal communication, 7 April 2015). This then returns

us to one of key issues raised by the concept of respectful treatment: in practice, treating

remains with respect is subjective and depends on what those involved think or feel is

respectful based on the institutional and cultural context.

The other aspect to separating human remains is that it allows for access to those collections to be restricted. While this is common practice for all museum collections, for human remains it is also related to recognising and respecting particular cultural sensitivities:

> …so they're in separate storage cabinets to which only me and the collections person responsible have keys and so access is strictly limited [….] it's just part of the internal security, but obviously with human remains it takes on an added sensitivity.
> (Interview with Paul Smith, University of Oxford Museum of Natural History, 30 March 2015)

However, this restriction of access to human remains collections should not be understood as museums becoming even less transparent about their holdings. In fact, demands for information that occurred as part of repatriation claims, combined with increased public concern around the lack of transparency following the retained organs scandal, directly influenced efforts in many museums holding large human-remains collections to audit those collections and make collections information public. For example, in 1992, the Royal College of Surgeons of England refused permission for the publication of their holdings of Indigenous Ancestral remains in the World Archaeology Bulletin, but by the early 2000s was committed to creating a publically accessible online catalogue. When asked about this, former Curator Simon Chaplin explained: 'it's important that there should be no secrecy about remains held in museums, information about the collection should be there for people to discover, which is why putting the Royal College of Surgeons collections online was very important.' (S. Chaplin, personal communication, 7 April 2015). So, what has emerged is how, within UK museum practice, separating and limiting access to human remains and being more transparent about the collections the museum holds have become linked to the concept of treating human remains with respect. Having focused so far on the results of the interactions

between museum staff and human remains, I now want to consider those actual interactions because it is through this embodied practice that we can see how museum staff conceptualise the human remains they work with.

Based on her experience at London's Natural History Museum, Margaret Clegg suggests the same level of care should be applied to all human remains in the collection. As she explains, 'we should treat all remains with the same reverence; yes I don't think that's too strong a word' (M. Clegg, personal communication, 30 January 2015). In her use of the word 'reverence', used to mean that a deep respect for someone or something is being shown, Clegg indicates an emotional element to the practice of working with human remains. Working with all types of museum collections is different to handling objects in everyday life, a set of particular handling practices are applied, greater care is taken, but this physical interaction with human remains is also affective, with museum staff talking about feelings of responsibility, care, privilege, and respect:

> The people here that work with the remains are quite serious when they do it, and part
> of that seriousness comes from, not only the awareness that they are handling human
> materials but also because of their inherent respect for that aspect of the collection.
> (Interview with Norman MacLeod, Natural History Museum, 17 March 2015)

However, this does not mean that the standards of collections care in relation to human remains are uniformly high. As a museum professional I have myself seen examples of poorly stored or documented human remains collections, yet in all cases the staff have been aware of the issues and actively attempting to make improvements. While on-going work to improve the standards of collections care of museum collections is common practice, what is

noticeable is that since the publication of the DCMS guidelines, human remains collections appear to have been prioritised.

In creating separate areas for human remains within museum stores, people have developed particular relationships with those spaces. As Margaret Clegg, former Head of the Human Remains Unit at the Natural History Museum, explains in regards to the human remains store at the Natural History Museum, having the remains in a separate store makes it obvious to people that they are going into a 'different space', a space that is not only affective, but also in which certain behaviours have become expected (M. Clegg, personal communication, 30 January 2015). In discussing respectful treatment, it also needs to be highlighted that the practice expected of staff is extended to everyone accessing the collections. This includes researchers, volunteers, and visitors, with the expected standards being explained to them prior to allowing any interaction with remains and behaviour deemed as unacceptable being grounds for withdrawal of access. Respectful treatment in practice can therefore be understood as certain behaviours performed during the interactions between the remains, people, and space.[16]

Cultural Sensitivities and Consultation

Although it has become clear that the concept of the respectful treatment of human remains is influenced by context, what has not yet been considered are the differences in cultural sensitivities between remains within the same collection. Writing about Indigenous human remains in British museums Laura Peers, Curator for the Americas Collections at the Pitt Rivers, gives the example from her own practice of speaking and offering tobacco to the spirits when working with remains from certain communities in North America (Peers 2009: 94). Having been requested to perform these ceremonies by tribal members from those

communities, in respecting these cultural practices Peers is demonstrating a respect for the living and the meanings that the remains have for them and in doing so, is respecting and taking responsibility for someone else's ancestors. For Margaret Clegg, the recognition of particular sensitivities is important as showing a lack of respect to the dead had the potential to 'harm the living' (M. Clegg, personal communication, 30 January 2015). What this shows is that non-European human remains, particularly those of Indigenous peoples, that are held in UK museums have become categorised as culturally sensitive, and in some cases contentious. Repatriation can therefore be seen as contributing to a museum practice that is more alive to different cultural sensitivities. Speaking about her work on repatriation at the Natural History Museum, Margaret Clegg recalled that visiting Aboriginal communities in Australia and working with Aboriginal researchers and interns impacted on how she reacted to certain human remains within the collections:

> I came across a set of remains that when I opened the box and looked at the label I was outraged that they should be in the collection. […] I was outraged and I put the lid back on the box and I sat down, took a deep breath and thought oh my God these people aren't even related to me and I'm outraged about this. (Interview with Margaret Clegg, 30 January 2015)

Although Margaret Clegg did not want to elaborate further on the reason for her outrage, what this illustrates is how the meanings that human remains hold for the individuals working with them are not fixed; they are in flux with different aspects becoming foregrounded by personal experience and circumstances.

This is not to say that a better understanding of the histories of collections and recognising and respecting alternative views has not influenced practice related to other parts of human remains collections. At Manchester Museum, in light of changed public perceptions, the ethical approaches to all the human remains in the collection were examined, as respecting alternative views was seen as part of respectful treatment (Besterman 2004: 14). Having taken a consultative and poly-vocal approach to the temporary display of Lindow Man in 2008 (see Sitch 2010), the museum decided to try to open up the debate around ethical and sensitive display by partially covering some of the mummies on display and asking for the views of their visitors. But rather than being seen as the museum being consultative, 'covering the mummies' became a symbol for 'political correctness gone mad' (Kennedy 2008; Jenkins 2011).

> We then became mired in this terrible controversy about covering up our Egyptian mummies unilaterally, and actually we weren't doing that, we are often presented as having decided, almost ourselves for reasons of what were deemed to be political correctness, [....] it was actually part of a consultation but it wasn't presented as such in the media. (Interview with Bryan Sitch, Manchester Museum, 6 January 2015)

The public reaction to Manchester Museum was overwhelming negative as evidenced by the comments on *Egypt at the Manchester Museum* blog. The theme that runs through the complaints is that the museum was not respecting the views of their visitors who wished to see the remains uncovered. As one comment states; 'I could only imagine that the visitors of the Manchester Museum in the future will only be tremendously disappointed when they realized that they could have the opportunity to see the face of the mummies but were not able to due to some foolish policies' (Egypt at the Manchester Museum 2008).

Ironically, given what the museum was trying to do, one of the complaints was that the museum should not have taken the decision to cover the mummies without consultation (Anon 2008). Despite the public backlash faced by Manchester Museum on this occasion, consultation with stakeholder groups and visitors around the display of human remains has continued to be the approach the museum takes (Sitch 2010), as well as being proclaimed as good practice by other institutions including the British Museum (Mays 2014) and English Heritage (Wallis and Blain 2011). This approach appears to follow the idea of the post-colonial museum as inclusive and consultative and so through recognising human remains as culturally sensitive and consulting with different stakeholder groups, the museum is able, or at least attempts, to mitigate the tensions between two different parts of its identity, that of an educator and that of an ethical institution (Nilsson Stutz 2013: Di Domenico 2015).

As with practice within the museum stores, the respectful treatment of human remains on public display is demonstrated through the museum encouraging, or discouraging, certain behaviours. As Sir Peter Morris explains with reference to the type of behaviour considered respectful in the Hunterian Museum at Royal College of Surgeons of England, 'well you're looking at the specimens, you're reading or listening to a guide tell you about them but you're not laughing or making jokes, that's what I mean by respect' (P. Morris, personal communication, 18 December 2014). In the Hunterian Museum, the public are asked not to take photographs, even though images of many of the specimens on display are available on the on-line database.[17] This suggests that it is not the images of dead that the museum is concerned about, but how people are behaving within the museum when taking photographs and how they are the seen to be acting in images which may be shared publically, both of which may impact on the image of the museum as an organisation that claims to treat human

remains with respect. So although there are still visitors who will pose for photographs next to remains, the institution makes it clear that they regard this behaviour as inappropriate as demonstrated in this example from the Hunterian Museum:

> As the couple approached the display case [containing the skeleton of Charles Byrne], the man already had a small camera out and stopped some distance away whilst the woman posed in front of the case. Just as the man raised the camera a gallery assistant approached him and told him that taking pictures in the gallery was not allowed, the man apologised and replied he had not seen the signs. The women then joined them looking disappointed but nodding and apologising when the gallery assistant repeated that photography was not allowed. The couple then walked away to look at objects displayed in other cases. I approached the gallery assistant and asked if visitors taking pictures was a common thing. He replied that it was and they frequently had to ask people not to take images. He added that it was a particular problem with Charles Byrne, as people tended to pose in front of the case, which he felt was not very respectful, and created the wrong atmosphere in the gallery. (Extract from author's research diary, 11 December 2014).

So, just as behind the scenes in the stores, the framing of certain types of behaviour as inappropriate is a way by which the museum can demonstrate how human remains are conceptualised as special and deserving of respectful treatment.

Conclusions

With any attempt to understand what the impacts of repatriation have been on museum practice in the United Kingdom, there is a need to consider the wider socio-cultural shift around the conceptualisation of the dead body and the development of new theoretical

approaches to museum practice with which repatriation is entangled. However, it is important that repatriation is not positioned as simply a product of these factors, but as a contributing element. The opening out of historical narratives and a greater engagement with the multiple, cohering, and competing meanings that human remains hold, has seen human remains collections within UK museums become considered as culturally sensitive. Repatriation can therefore be seen as one of the drivers behind the re-examination of professional ethics and practice that resulted in the development of new policies and guidelines related to human remains within UK museum collections.

Through examining how the concepts contained within museum human remains policies are applied in practice, it becomes clear that respectful treatment is a culturally constructed and context dependant concept, something that museums should perhaps acknowledge more explicitly when stating they treat human remains 'with respect'. What also emerges is that within UK museums the concept of respectful treatment has become linked to certain practices and behaviours within museums, both behind the scenes and within public spaces. In the negotiation of repatriation claims, museum staff and trustees have had to engage with alternative narratives and, even in refusing to return remains, are forced to consider the history of the collections, the authority of the institution, and issues of ownership and consent. These interactions have sensitised non-European collections of human remains held within UK museums, in that these collections are now considered as being culturally sensitive and potentially problematic due to the possibility of repatriation claims or demands for particular cultural considerations in relation to their care. Therefore, in thinking about the impacts of repatriation, the focus is naturally on the remains of Indigenous peoples held within UK museums and negotiation of new social relations that occurs as part of the repatriation process. In the UK there are clear relationships that can be linked directly to

repatriation, such as the return of a Māori skull from Warrington Museum to the repatriation program at Te Papa Tongarewa in October 2013. Having contacted Te Papa for guidance, the staff at Warrington worked to arrange the repatriation with a delegation from New Zealand coming to Warrington to collect the skull and hold a public event. For Te Herekiekie Herewini, Manager of the Repatriation program, hand-over events are 'an opportunity to actually connect, to show them why it's so important for us, and also to indicate that we actually appreciate that they've been looking after our ancestors' (Te Herekiekie Herewini, personal communication, 5 June 2015). For Peers, one of the meanings human remains in museums can embody is the political and social relations between one people and another. However, while recognising the potential of repatriation to create new relationships, she questions if this has really occurred, suggesting most repatriations 'have simply been symbolic, only briefly social acts' (Peers 2009: 92). In terms of on-going relationships between community groups and UK institutions post repatriation, this may be true, especially if the museum holds no other objects from that community, but as already discussed, repatriation requests are entangled with wider shifts in museum practice and therefore can be seen as contributing to changing practice in terms of consultations and on-going relationships — as this example from the British Museum demonstrates:

> The stakeholders in Sudan donated the collection [of mummies] to the British Museum […] and what we're doing now is actually working on training, for the last few years, what will be the first physical anthropologist in Sudan, so they can have more information on which to base those decisions on and we're also hoping to help them develop appropriate storage for the human remains in Khartoum so that there will be space available if such collections are...excavated again in the near future. (Interview with Daniel Antoine, Curator of Physical Anthropology, The British Museum, 12 January 2016)

Following the discussions initiated by repatriation claims, there have been numerous formal and informal debates among museum professionals,[18] and human remains in museums have become a popular topic for museological research that considers issues of practice, representation, ownership, and the restitution of cultural heritage (for example Tythacott and Arvanitis 2014; Gieson, 2013; Alberti 2011; Larson 2014; O'Sullivan and Jones 2015). An awareness of cultural sensitivities surrounding human remains and an appreciation of the multiple and shifting meanings they have has also created new networks around the collections as museums consult on issues of care and respectful display, not only with source communities but also with museum visitors and other groups of stakeholders.

While agreeing with Jenkins (2011) that repatriation has contributed to the problematisation of human remains in the UK, in that human remains collections have become regarded as culturally sensitive parts of the collection that require particular consideration in relation to ethics and practice, I would argue that this is not symptomatic of the 'crisis of cultural authority' that Jenkins suggests. As seen in the British Museum's refusal to repatriate the Toi moko to New Zealand, under the current system museums still retain the authority to make decisions regarding the human remains in their collections. However, in challenging and problematising that authority, repatriation has contributed to a re-articulation of museum ethics, the development of new consultative approaches and formation of new relationships. So, while it is difficult, if not impossible, to untangle exactly what impacts repatriation has had on each individual institution in terms of practice, the Indigenous agency of repatriation claims and the influence they have had within the UK should be recognised and also used to continue questioning, challenging, and developing our policies and approaches to human remains collections in UK museums.

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England who have supported and assisted me with this research.

[3] There is a large body of literature on repatriation and human remains in museums but for an
introduction to the debate in the United Kingdom see the publications by Alberti et al. (2009)

and Lohman and Goodnow (2006), the transcript from 'Human remains: Objects to study or ancestors to bury' (Hubert 2003) and the *Telegraph* article by Chris Stringer (2003).

[4] The term 'politics of regret' is used by Olick and Coughlin (2003) in their argument that redress movements have become characteristic of our age and that regret is a symptom of modernity and form of historical consciousness tied to the decline of the nation state.

[5] The 'Cultural Property: Return and Illicit Trade' report by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport was published in July 2000. The report recommended that there should be discussions that worked towards preparing a statement of principles and guidance relating to the care of and requests for return of human remains, better access to information on holdings of human remains, and a consultation exercise on the terms of legislation to permit the trustees of national collections to remove human remains from their collections (DCMS 2003: 2).

[6] In the UK these events are commonly referred to as the Alder Hey scandal.

[7] The other impact on museums of the 2004 Human Tissue Act is that museums in England, Wales and Northern Ireland require a licence from the Human Tissue Authority (HTA) to display any human remains under 100 years old. For information on the role of the HTA see https://www.hta.gov.uk for further information.

[8] In line with the Human Tissue Act 2004 the term 'human remains' as used in the *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* does not include hair and nails, although it is acknowledged that some communities give these a sacred importance (DCMS 2005: 9).

[9] Teague (2007) has argued the repatriation discourse tended to either be pro- or anti-repatriation, which has led to the framing of the debate as a contest between science and tradition. In the UK, the 2003 panel discussion 'Human remains: Objects to study or ancestors to bury'*,* and the extreme views presented in the media, reinforced the polemic view of the

debate. However, recent work (e.g. Peers 2009; Krmpotich, Fontein and Harries 2010) has sought to present a more nuanced understanding of the meanings of human remains by drawing on the concept of the cultural biography of objects (see Appadurai 1986; Gosden and Marshal 1999; Gosden 2001; Myers 2001).

[10] The 2001 Acquisitions and Disposal Policy had now been superseded by the 2011 version which states that the College will consider claims for human remains and other artefacts of 'non-European indigenous peoples' (RCS 2011, 7).

[11] The remains of Charles Byrne, also known as the Irish Giant, have become contentious due to Byrne reportedly having requested that his remains be buried at sea. However, on Byrne's death in 1783, surgeon-anatomist John Hunter managed to secure the remains for his collection. Currently on display in the Hunterian Museum, the remains have been the subject of media attention (e.g. Dalrymple 2011) and on-going requests for Byrne's reported wish to be buried at sea to be honoured.

[12] In 2008 the British Museum agreed to return 9 bone fragments to New Zealand but turned down the request to return 7 Toi moko; the details of the decision can be found in minutes of Trustees' meeting (British Museum 2008)

[13] Data from interviews with staff at Royal College of Surgeons of England, the Natural History Museum, the British Museum, Manchester Museum, and the University of Oxford Museum of Natural History.

[14] Of relevance to this argument is that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to which the UK is a signatory, states that Indigenous peoples have the right to the repatriation of their human remains (United Nations General Assembly 2007: Article 12).

[15] The exception to this is that some ancient human remains are part of the palaeontology collections.

[16] This concept draws on work by Geoghegan and Hess (2014) that the examination of the emotional aspects of embodied practice explores the relationships between objects, people, and place to reveal how the museum store room is an emotional, evocative, and affective space. Particular practices related to respect can also be seen in ancestral remains stores in Australia and New Zealand, where the impact of repatriation has been the creation of distinct spaces in which certain cultural practices such as washing or speaking to the dead have become standard practice (Morton, 2017).

[17] It should be noted that no images of remains that have been repatriated or remains covered by the Human Tissue Act are available on the SurgiCat on-line database.

[18] The on-going debates and discussions around the retention and display of human remains has also created new professional networks, most notably the Human Remains Subject Specialist Network https://subjectspecialistnetworks.org.uk/