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Moccasin Tracks: Reading the Narrative in Traditional Indigenous Craft Work

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Moccasin Tracks: Reading the Narrative in Traditional Indigenous Craftwork

by

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The colonization of Canada has produced deleterious effects for the First Nations peoples that originally inhabited the land. Through sharing stories with a number of First Nations craft producers the objective of this research was to capture the endurance of First Nations culture beyond the disastrous effects of colonization and repression faced by the First Peoples of this continent. This study investigates the production of craft goods in First Nations communities by building on the concept of the narrative embedded in the material craft culture. By *narrative*, this study refers to the culturally specific ways that stories are created and maintained to preserve elements of culture and society. Craft goods continue to be produced and used in these communities as a way of preserving and reproducing the specific tribal knowledges that exist within these groups.

Data in this project comes from semi-structured interviews with Indigenous craft makers. The methodology was developed to confront the positionality of a non-Indigenous researcher pursuing research objectives in a First Nations community and with the aim to be mindful and mitigate the effects of social privilege and power in the analysis of the data. Interviews and notes were analyzed through a hybrid of narrative and thematic analysis. The themes emerging from preliminary analysis of the data fit within a theoretical framework that centres and privileges Indigenous experience and perspective. Themes include: spirituality, family, animals, social structure, and resistance. These themes contribute to a larger cultural narrative of relationality and endurance embedded in the Indigenous material craft culture being investigated in the research. Together, these themes offer a clearer vision of the First Nations perspective and what it means to maintain a distinct cultural identity under the ongoing campaign of colonization.

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I am fortunate to have been born and raised in southern Alberta where I have had the opportunity to develop an appreciation for the land. My experience in graduate school has helped me to further develop my appreciation for the lessons that I have learned as a result of my upbringing. I owe these lessons to many people who have in one way or another entered my life.

To my late uncle Dale who showed me the value of resourcefulness and ingenuity. Without your guidance I would not be able to recognize the simple treasures that the world provides. The lessons that you taught me have helped to guide me through the obstacles that I have faced.

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To the Milan family who supported me throughout my academic career and who first introduced me to the Stoney Nakoda people. You gave me the opportunity to develop the first-hand knowledge that helped me to navigate through this project with greater ease. Your contribution to this research is without question.

My friend Brent Dodginghorse, thank you for your help and guidance in getting my foot in the door and vouching for my character in your community. I look forward to handing you a

copy of this completed research. I am in your debt.

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the First Nations of Canada and especially to the Niitsitapi, the Tsuut'ina and the Stoney Nakoda. I feel incredible pride to walk along the same trails and traces that the ancestors did so long ago.

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1.0 Introduction

An honest introduction to this research starts with me introducing myself. I am Wyatt Anton, a Master's student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Calgary. I come from a mixed-European heritage that I have never had much interest in exploring. I grew up on Treaty 7 territory. My mother's side of the family homesteaded here in the late-19th century and still reside no more than a stone's throw from that original plot of land. My father's side of the family settled near Maple Creek, Saskatchewan on Treaty 4 territory but later sold that land and relocated to Calgary, Alberta.

My interest in craft work came from my father. My father makes handcrafted goods. Years of watching him in his workshop gave me an appreciation for the way things are made when they are built by hand. It has also helped me to acknowledge the many different influences that affect the production of goods that are designed and created by a single person. He primarily makes horse tack, but he often branches off and builds various accessories such as belts and purses, as well as many of the tools he uses.

A lifetime of experience has taught him how things should be made so they function as they should. He understands the appropriate materials to be used and the most effective skillsets for the project. For example, reins that are used for steering a horse while riding, should be of a certain weight and made to a particular length to most effectively communicate with the animal. Today, there are many books, classes and how-to videos that demonstrate aspects of this knowledge. In my experience, none of these offer the same understanding provided by the stories and experiences that goes along with how he makes them. His influences often come from his own experiences or a customer's preference. Other times he might just want to flex his creative muscle and try something new. Just as every picture tells a story, the products my father makes do as well.

Through the course of this study I have found many parallels between the craft work my father does and the craft work that is done in the Indigenous communities of the surrounding Treaty 7 territory. There is a relationship to the land, a humility found only by those whose existence is so closely intertwined with the ebbs and flows of the natural environment. The products are imbued with a knowledge that does not see humans as entities separate from nature, but as integral components of it. There is a practicality that stems from this relationship that favours simplicity and parsimony while also encouraging and recognizing skill in the minute details. Necessity and function are at the core of the products which are combined with creative vision and skill to form symbols of status. There is recognition of someone's standing in a social hierarchy with the things they make or acquire. The objects represent knowledge of traditional ways.

Growing up, there were many occasions where my life overlapped with those of the people who would potentially become participants in this research. I have worked on infrastructure projects in Morley and volunteered my time to chase Chiniki cows and maintain a riding arena for the Bearspaw band. During my rodeo career I competed with First Nations cowboys from across the country. Connecting with common themes related to these experiences contributed to improving my access to community contacts and potential research participants. My background facilitated the *getting in* part of accessing the field by enabling me to fill a specific, familiar role and to establish rapport with participants (Berg & Lune, 2012).

The thematic and substantive content of this study makes it appropriate for me to introduce the stories and voices that provide the fundamental influences upon which this project was built. This research attempts to avoid detached theorizing and removing the information from the First Nations storytellers or from the land, practice and context that gives it form. The data are imbued with Indigenous culture that are prevalent in the current material and written by non-Indigenous

persons (Martineau & Ritskes 2014). My personal history with the process of craft making has made it possible for me to recognize, if not understand, the cultural narrative evident in the finished product. I am pursuing this research as a means of exploring the practice of craft making and the narratives embedded therein, that has been a significant component of my own upbringing, using a decolonial perspective in an Indigenous setting.¹

Prefacing the research in this manner is a recommendation by Plains Cree/Saulteaux scholar, Margaret Kovach (2009). Providing background information on myself and explaining my motivations for pursuing this project, acts to orient the reader and give insight into any potential biases that may arise. I have not intended to present my personal history as an equivocation of my experience with the experience of First Nations peoples. Instead, my experiences have created some common ground to connect with participants.

1.1 Purpose of Study

Craft work has become an easily recognizable symbol of Canadian First Nations' cultures. Objects such as: headdresses, tipis, moccasins, and dream catchers abound in present day mainstream culture. Traditional Indigenous (or Indigenous-inspired) patterns are used in fashion while skillsets such as beadwork² are utilized by many non-Indigenous crafters. The presence of First Nations culture is often seen without a genuine First Nations presence and this has sparked

much debate on the issue of cultural appropriation which is tantamount to the theft of *voice* (Battiste & Henderson 2000; Coombe 1993).

¹ I have been as true as I can be to the Indigenous lens through which this information was entrusted to me by the First Nation storytellers involved with this project. I realize that as a non-Indigenous researcher that my analysis may be challenged as 'appropriating' a First Nation standpoint, however, I have been guided throughout this process by my Dene supervisor, Dr. Cora Voyageur and my analysis has thoroughly examined by my Indigenous examining committee that consisted of Metis scholar, Dr. Robert Henry and Anishenabeg-Saulteaux scholar, Dr. Jennifer Leason.

² Although beadwork, as it has come to be presently recognized, was not present among Indigenous groups prior to contact with Europeans (porcupine quills and shells have been replaced as the material medium by glass or plastic beads), it has come to represent a significant facet of Indigenous artistic and cultural expression.

There are many social themes that can be discussed in terms of craft goods because craft is a very human-centric means of production. That is, the creation of craft goods revolves around human experience and human interaction. It is both personal, in that one person physically creates it, but it is social as well, being that craft knowledge is generated and transmitted through human interaction. In the market economy, crafts are valued as avenues of commercial enterprise such as the tourist trade market. For many Indigenous communities, *authentic* or *traditional* crafts have been a means of financial gain in cultural and tourist commerce (Chibnik 2008; Wherry 2007). Furthermore, crafts can be used as a symbol of belonging (Krpmotich, Howard, and Knight 2016), to connect people separated from traditional settings.

This study explores the voices of First Nations craftspeople and the stories they tell through the production of craft items. The data demonstrates how the stories associated with this craft work can describe a journey through the various interstices between Indigeneity and methodology, colonialism and science, and culture and agency.³ The objective of this research is to illustrate *authorship* and experience through a medium other than the written word. With this, to promote awareness of the human record in the ways that we interact with the world, thereby contributing to the development of a *cultural literacy*.

1.2 A Definition of the Key Concepts

To avoid confusion in the text, the definition of a number of important terms and concepts used in the research will be included.

- **Culture:** encompasses the socially transmitted aspects of human life. Non-physical culture refers to language, music, ideas, customs, norms, and spirituality. Material culture refers to physical expressions, objects that are used or interacted with in specific ways according

³ These concepts are not binary or oppositional, rather, the research looks at how they interact and relate in various ways.

to an individual or society's non-physical culture. Material culture may include cars, clothes, pieces of art, or buildings that are produced by humans themselves, but some definitions also include pieces of the physical landscape that humans regard in a specific way (Loader 2014).

- **Craft:** is used to describe the process and production of *handicraft(s)*. This more specific designation refers to the design and production of items by a single person (a *craftsperson*, *craft worker*, or *artisan*) that in most cases bear significant relevance to that person's culture. Crafts as physical objects are a form of material culture, however, the techniques and skillsets used in the production of crafts (which may also be referred to as "craft" or "crafting") and the use of the finished craft can be regarded as non-physical culture. Crafts, in this sense, are concerned simultaneously with the individual personality and the relationship to the larger cultural entity as they give concrete expression to the supra-individual unity of the culture (Loader 2014). There is debate on the distinction between art and craft (Kikuchi 2015) that I will not delve into at length, rather, let this serve as a disclaimer that in this research there is some fluidity between the realms of art and craft.
- **Narrative:** the spoken or written account of connected events that reveals someone's experiences. Narratives can be told in many settings, take many forms and contain various degrees of connection to actual events or persons (Manning & Cullum-Swan 1994).
- **First Nations:** the legal designation of the original peoples of Canada that have existed within the territory since time immemorial. They have a special relationship with the Federal government and are governed by the *Indian Act* (Voyageur, 2008). As of 2011

there are 634 First Nations in Canada (Gadacz, 2006). This research speaks to members from four of those Nations.

- **Colonialism:** the imperial project of the European powers that began in the 15th century which sought the expansion of political authority and resource extraction in foreign lands across the globe. This practice of *colonization* through which European nations exerted political control and the exploitation of resources from foreign lands (Young 2016). In Canada (as well as the USA, Australia, and Aotearoa), colonization took on a specific iteration -- settler colonialism. Settler colonialism differs in that the colonies are repopulated by newcomers who displace, subjugate, and/or eliminate the original inhabitants (Wolfe 2006).

1.3 Statement of Problem

I have been asked many times about what my research is, and I have had trouble giving a single, unified response. “Reading the narrative in Indigenous craft work,” in the simplest sense, means understanding First Nations societies through the material culture it creates and sustains. Substantively, this project explores the transmission of culture and knowledge in Indigenous communities through the craft production of material goods.

This research examines and illustrates a perspective that recognizes the personal and cultural contributions of First Nations craft makers as they practice their craft making traditions. As mentioned above, craft making is a material expression of the supra-individual unity of the culture, which is showcased throughout the process and in the final product (Loader 2014). Both the process and end result attempt to communicate an understanding of the non-physical culture of the crafter’s first person narrative. To demonstrate this, the research explores the experiences and knowledge of craft makers as they produce craft items distinctive of their culture.

This study pursues the following objectives:

1. To investigate the role that craft work plays in sustaining cultural narratives

The primary objective of this research is uncovering narratives embedded in craft work. Although there has been research conducted on the transmission of culture through material items, such as Indigenous art work (Martineau & Ritskes 2014), the aim of this research is to explore the avenue of literacy that is made available through the process of craft work, as defined above. Next, is to examine how these narratives are transmitted; *how* they are embedded in material objects, who can access them; and the social norms or rules these stories are influenced by. The interviews were semi-structured with this objective in mind (Appendix A).

Understanding the role of this form of culture in carrying and transmitting narratives could help to raise awareness and appreciation for craft work in Indigenous communities and acknowledged as a way to preserve minority cultures.

2. Examining the type of stories or cultural narratives that are contained in craft goods produced in Indigenous communities

Building on the knowledge generated by the first objective, this topic examines the content of the stories that are embedded in the process and product of craft work. The content of these stories can potentially add to our overall understanding of Indigeneity and help to provide insight into the worldview of Indigenous people.

3. Understanding if, and how, craft work in Indigenous communities contributes to resistance and/or Decolonization

This objective focuses on how craft work has endured and continues to survive. The theoretical discussion that takes place in Chapter Two illustrates the role of knowledge systems in marginalizing Indigenous voices. Craft work, therefore, may permit an avenue to counter an oppressive, colonial hegemony and privilege Indigenous knowledge in colonial spaces.

1.4 Research Questions

My research findings illustrate how Indigenous crafts are made, who they are made by and their significance to the larger cultural identity. I examine the rights and protocols that are part of the craft making process. Additionally, I explore the beliefs of modern-day craft makers and how they pass along their skills and knowledge in a modern world. My research questions include:

1. How are traditional crafts/goods created?
2. Who are the people who make crafts?
3. What is the significance of craft making to you and your community?
4. What role does craft making play in your community?
5. Why did you choose to participate in this activity?
6. How is craft knowledge regarded in the community?
7. How is this knowledge transmitted and who can access it?
8. How are different crafts used to define status?

1.5 Theoretical Orientation

As this project collects and interprets knowledge from First Nations participants, I rely on the critical/deconstructionist theoretical perspectives of Anti-colonialism and Decolonialism. This theoretical foundation is adopted on the basis of my non-Indigenous status as a means of mediating between my perspective and social location, and that of the participants. The focus in the study is on how to appropriately treat (collect, interpret, and re-present) the knowledge shared by the participants. Therefore, the objective of this is to de-centre the/my Eurocentric perspective as a means of creating a space that privileges the knowledge and ways of knowing shared by the participants (Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012). In other words, I am attempting *decolonize* a space to more accurately investigate the meanings in the stories and narratives that are told by the

participants. This attempt at *decolonizing* space within an academic research project appears haphazard at times. I try to reconcile both my white colonial status and the Eurocentric requirements of this research with the complexity of Indigenous knowledge(s) (Battiste & Henderson 2000).

A significant feature within this mediation is recognizing structures of Indigenous knowledge. It is important to understand the idea of inter-connectivity or relationality that permeates the Indigenous perspective of the world (Kovach 2009; Romm 2015). Relationality means that all things are essential to all other things. The habit of Western modernity to isolate, disconnect everything is not compatible with an Indigenous perspective (Battiste & Henderson 2000). For researchers assuming the Indigenous perspective in their work, themes such as nature, spirituality, and language are all inter-related in a complex network of connections.⁴

Expanding on the role and practice of craft work in a broader scope leads me to an examination of the concept of *alienation* as conceived of by Karl Marx ([1844] 1983). Marx posited that during the industrial revolution, the specialization of labour and market capitalism combined to alienate workers from what made them human. Marx recognized that people invest a part of themselves in what they make. Industrialized production sees a people's productive capacity reduced to a value in an equation aimed at streamlining efficiency for capital accumulation. As opposed to production under market capitalism, the hand crafting of items (the exercise of agency) and person-to-person commerce (social participation) allows the craftsman to retain a sense of wholeness and being ([1844] 1983: 131-152).

⁴ The consequences of this will be discussed in more detail in the Methodology chapter.

1.6 Benefits of the Study

There are a number of potential benefits that this study provides. It reinforces the importance of recovering and preserving traditional, Indigenous, knowledge through voice. This study acts to explore ways to transmit, translate, interpret, and secure valuable knowledge for future generations through the process of craft making.

It is important to recognize what is lost with the disappearance of traditional ways of knowing and the people that keep them alive (Simpson 2004; Calliou 2004). The greater objective within this is identifying the practice of craft making as a space where oral histories, traditional knowledge, and identity can be transmitted within communities. This study recognizes the irreplaceability of these experiences and ways of knowing, and the value they provide for future revitalization.

Another benefit is that it contributes to the growing body of academic literature that explores the ethical pursuit of research in Indigenous communities. This is demonstrated herein with an accordance to Indigenous protocols surrounding the sharing and generation of knowledge with Indigenous knowledge holders. Developing a greater understanding of the practical methodological issues faced by researchers in these settings will aid in bridging the gap between Western academia and traditional knowledges.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The information shared in this study is limited to the personal experiences of the participants within the cultures in which they were raised. The results of the interviews reflect the specific views of the participants that shared their stories and cannot be generalized to all First Nations or their craft cultures. The participants were selected on the basis of their participation in craft making activities in their communities, on the advice provided by the community contacts who assisted with

recruitment. This cannot be considered a representative sample although it does provide some insight into the perspectives and practices of First Nations craft makers.

The perspective that I bring to the project as a non-Indigenous researcher and the institutional requirements of this report also restrict my interpretation of data and how I am able to present it. I have tried to mediate the potential effects that this may have on the research by following tribal protocols for meeting with elders and establishing an anti-colonial theoretical foundation. However, the experience and status of being *Caucasian* while pursuing research on a topic within the realm of traditional Indigenous knowledge can only safely be assumed to restrict access and engagement with the data shared/generated.

1.8 Participants' Profile

I sought out potential participants who were actively involved in making crafts in the First Nations communities near Calgary, Alberta. To recruit participants for this research, I enlisted the help of several 'key' community contacts to assist me in reaching out and connecting with the appropriate individuals. This effort resulted in securing five participants who were willing to sit down for an interview and tell me about their experiences with craft making.

The result was five individual interviews that were audio recorded and transcribed. The participants shared with me their experiences involving how they learned about craft making, how they teach it to others, and what inspires them in their creative process. This data helped to generate new knowledge about how personal and cultural narratives are embedded into craft goods.

Below are brief descriptions of each participant:

Bruce Starlight

Bruce Starlight is an Elder from the Tsuut'ina First Nation on the southwest side of Calgary, Alberta. Mr. Starlight makes a variety of crafts such as headdresses, beadwork, powwow

regalia, and furniture for tipis. He indicated that he has been involved in craft making for close to 50 years. He also holds traditional ceremonies in his community and has done the same at events overseas. Mr. Starlight has been participating with a linguistics team on a language revitalization project in his community and also teaches the Tsuut'ina language. He cited his grandmother and father as his most important teachers.

Lee Deranger

Lee Deranger is an Anishinaabe woman, originally from Ontario, who now makes her home in Calgary, Alberta with her husband. There are a number of characteristics that set Mrs. Deranger apart from the other participants. For one, her craft work ranges from traditional to non-traditional works. She grew up in an urban environment (Toronto) which may help to explain her range of craft works. Like Mr. Starlight, Mrs. Deranger started her craft apprenticeship by her grandma. She builds traditional Indigenous items such as headdresses and pipe bags and practices traditional Indigenous skillsets, such as quill work. She also produces a range of mainstream items such as dreamcatchers, jewelry, and barrettes that are sold as consumer goods at trade shows.

Tom Crane Bear

Tom Crane Bear is a Siksika (Blackfoot) Elder who now resides in Banff, Alberta, where he works as an advisor for the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. He shares both Cree and Blackfoot heritage. Mr. Crane Bear is the eldest of the participants in the study and shared stories and knowledge going far back in the history of the First Nations in the region. He learned a good deal about craft making from his uncle. His specialty in craft making is headdresses and he belongs to a number of traditional societies involving the production and transfer of headdresses.

Elk Woman

Elk Woman is originally from the Siksika First Nation. She now lives in Tsuut'ina with her husband. Elk Woman made a variety of crafts for her family and the people in her community. She also indicated that she had sold goods at craft fairs for a period of time. She makes buckskin outfits, tipis, dance regalia, horse tack, and beaded jackets. Elk Woman has several children and a focus of her craft work has been to keep them outfitted with traditional cultural items. Elk Woman's own teachers were her mother, her grandmother and her grandmother on her husband's side.

Anonymous

This participant requested to remain anonymous and will be referred to as "A" or "Anonymous." *A* is a recognized Elder and traditional knowledge holder in his Treaty 7 Nation and has participated in the Sundance.⁵ His craft making consists of traditional tools made from antlers. *A* has a wealth of cultural knowledge that was passed on to him by his uncle, however, the participant acknowledged that they have only been practicing craft making for a short period of time (2-3 years). His focus in craft making has been building traditional tools. *A* teaches language and culture classes to children at a local school.

1.9 Chapter Summary

In Chapter One I focus on introducing the research topic and situating my ambitions and objectives. I present an overview of the study that illustrates the personal and academic motivations that inspired this research. I lay out the purpose of the study, the research problem, research questions, and a prelude to the theoretical discussion that takes place in Chapter Two. Chapter One includes

⁵ The Sundance is an important spiritual ceremony in some Indigenous cultures. It originated among the Plains Tribes of North America.

definitions to key concepts and terms that are used in the study. It also introduces the potential benefits that this research provides, a profile of the participants involved and the perceived limitations of the study.

Chapter Two expands on the theoretical orientation section in Chapter One that provides the foundation for the investigative perspective that this research will use. To supplement the theoretical examples provided, I review the academic literature related to the substantive and thematic content of this study. The theoretical review provides a more detailed interpretation of Marx's alienation and introduces the critical-theoretical basis that informs the concepts of post-colonialism and decolonization. I review cultural theory in terms of material culture and craft work and reflect on its place in contemporary society alongside industrialized modes of production.

Chapter Three details the methodology and means of collecting the data for the study. As this research focuses on craft work being produced within First Nations communities, the methodology chapter outlines the paradigmatic considerations that inform First Nations ways of life and knowing. I will also detail the practical elements of the processes and protocols necessary to perform research according to an Indigenous perspective of sharing and generating knowledge. Chapter Three concludes with a brief description of the analytical methods being employed in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter Four deals with the analysis and provides an overview of the data and collection process. In it, I describe meetings with participants and the preparation and organization of the data for the subsequent analysis. I describe the themes that emerged in the data and provide supplemental detail from the interviews. This chapter is divided into six sections; the first is a brief review of the data that was compiled in the interviews. The second illustrates the experiences of the participants as they became involved with the crafting traditions in their communities. The

third section examines the value placed on the traditional knowledge in the participants' communities. The fourth looks at the actual process of craft making. The fifth section looks at the *stories* that guide participants and are embedded in the crafts that they produce. In the final section, I use the data to demonstrate elements of cultural resistance and survival that are expressed in crafting traditions.

Chapter Five provides a discussion of the data and themes that are explored in the analysis section. These are expanded to critically examine the integral role played by stories in the organization of our social lives. The discussion moves on to explore the human record in the material world and endurance of our physical interactions within the material realm. The chapter ends with an illustration of the craft maker as a bridge, or channel, between past, present and future.

Chapter Six revisits the objectives put forth at the outset of this study. In the conclusion, I identify some of the limitations of the knowledge generated throughout this research and indicate paths towards further study in the field. I provide further contemplation for other non-Indigenous researchers considering academic ventures into the field of Indigenous studies.

2.0 Theoretical Underpinning and Literature Review

This chapter expands on the theoretical foundation introduced in Chapter One. It focuses on the concepts and practices of Anti-colonialism, Decolonialism, and Decolonization and how they are applied as the theoretical and conceptual bases for the research. This conceptual approach has been adopted in the research as a means of mitigating colonial ideologies that continue to course through academia (Young 2003:18). The discussion of these concepts also illustrates its connection to Marxist theory and the concept of alienation as it relates to the practice of craft work.

2.1 Critical Perspectives Towards Canada's Settler Colonialism

Relations between Canada and First Nations peoples are situated in the context of *settler colonialism* and the structures and processes implemented by it. A settler colony is a nation where “...over time, the invading Europeans (or their descendants) annihilated, displaced and/or marginalized the indigenes to become a majority non-indigenous population...” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2000, p. 211). The investigation of First Nations peoples’ culture and knowledge necessitates the understanding of these historical and social circumstances and the relationship that this entails. Dene scholar, Glen Coulthard, writes:

A settler-colonial relationship is one characterized by a particular form of *domination*; that is, it is a relationship where power – in this case, interrelated discursive and non-discursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power—has been structured into a relatively secure set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the *dispossession* of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority. 2014: 6-7

Settler colonialism, thus, provides the background for the enduring structures that exist around First Nations peoples and academia.

The institution of academia as a nexus for the generation of knowledge and understanding bears fault for the perpetuation of colonial perspectives and discourse. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), documented the ways in which control was sustained through the generation of knowledge. Colonial control was not simply a product of one nation imposing military force on another to subjugate them, but rather, control over it through the articulation of the culture of the colonized peoples. Said, explains Ashcroft et al (2000), "...examines the processes by which the 'Orient' was, and continues to be, constructed in European thinking" (p. 167). This allowed the European powers to marginalize populations by eroticizing them, fetishizing them, and, ultimately, othering them.⁶ This is commonly done through, what Said calls, "... the culturally sanctioned habit of deploying large generalizations by which reality is divided into various collectives: languages, races, types, colors, mentalities, each category being not so much a neutral designation as an evaluative interpretation" (1978: 227). Through a discourse that makes broad generalizations on any of the categories mentioned above, and then makes character judgements based on those categories, colonial power exerts itself based on the distinction between *us* and *them*.

Establishing the primacy of colonial knowledge produced a dichotomous relationship categorizing peoples into *civilized* or *savage*, *inferior* or *superior*, and ultimately, *right* or *wrong*. Being always informed by colonial encounter, *orientalist* discourse allowed the West to buttress its delusions of infallibility by pointing to the *Orient's* alien peculiarities. *Orientalism* was, thus, a way of generalizing, dehumanizing and alienating populations and cultures that were not of Western European descent and, therefore, justifying their subjugation through the colonization.

Dehumanization of Indigenous peoples provided the basis for the concept of *terra nullius*, or "nobody's land" (Harrington 2014; Wilson 2003). The proclamation that Europeans had

⁶ The terms here refer to ways in which a power dynamic was created by making non-European groups of colonized people appear *different* or *strange*.

discovered in Canada an uninhabited territory served as the basis for its colonization by foreign settlers and the displacement of the territory's original inhabitants. This is the result of policies that allowed for the usurpation of territory and governance along with the implementation of strategies of forced assimilation and cultural elimination. This gave them the obvious benefit of control over resources and people in the colonized territories allowing the extraction and aggregation of wealth. At the same time, colonized peoples suffered as a result of being relinquished of their autonomy and their sources of life and understanding (Simpson 2004). As traditional lands were subsumed by European powers traditional ways of being and knowing the world were erased. What follows is an annotated (but by no means comprehensive) list of these policies:

- **The Residential School System:** Residential schools (1883-1996) were part of a government sponsored programme seeking to extinguish traditional First Nations culture. The system forced the removal of First Nations children from their families and placed them in boarding schools that were rife with abuse (Miller 2018).
- **The Reserve System:** *Indian Reserves* are governed by the Indian Act confining First Nations communities to government allotted lands (McCue 2011).
- **The Pass System:** Created in 1885 to deal with “*Rebel Indians*” the Pass System restricted the movement of First Nations peoples off reserve unless they first obtained a signed pass from an Indian Agent. The system was officially ended in 1951 (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. 2015).
- **Banning Cultural Practices:** In 1880 the Government of Canada (through the Indian Act) issued a ban on the Potlatch ceremony and later the Sundance. Each were considered significant, if not the most important, cultural ceremonies to west coast First Nations

(Potlatch) and Plains Tribes (Sundance). The ban was repealed in 1951 (Fenelon & Hall 2008; Hanson 2009; Hill 2009).

The resulting social disorganization in First Nations communities that has resulted from these policies demonstrates the less visible interactions of the colonial state in the subjugation of First Nations peoples. As researchers Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) explain, “[a]s “at risk” peoples, Indigenous students and families are described as on the verge of extinction, culturally and economically bereft, engaged or soon-to-be engaged in self-destructive behaviors which can interrupt their school careers and seamless absorption into the economy” (p. 22). This is seen in the authorization of colonial knowledge and paradigmatic control that is used as further justification for paternalistic government policies. Under this kind of Gramscian hegemony,⁷ the role of anti-colonialism in academia becomes the generation, expansion, and/or legitimization of perspectives that challenge these ruling ideologies.

Ojibway scholar, Gerald Vizenor, (2008) in his book *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* confronts dominant settler perspectives by embarking on a project of reworking colonialist fiction and historical account. He does so in the same tone as Said’s *Orientalism* – by challenging and liberating the discourse that was originally used to marginalize and oppress colonized peoples and using it, instead, to rebel against mainstream ideas of history and discovery. For Vizenor (2008), survivance, “...is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination,⁸ and oblivion; survivance is the continuation of stories not a mere reaction...” (p. 1). His term *survivance* emerges from the medium of language and stories, reclaiming histories buried beneath the detritus of an oppressive and alien Western culture.

⁷ Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony denotes an ideology that arbitrarily legitimizes the superiority of the ruling class that produces “...domination by consent” (Ashcroft et al. 2000, p. 116)

⁸ Referring to the elimination of ethno-cultural identity

Story (the composition of personal life experiences, histories, folklore, etc.) emerges from the discourse as a strong and effective instrument to transform perspectives. These stories grant agency and presence, and they are, "...the sources of survivance, the comprehension and empathies of natural reason, tragic wisdom and the provenance of new literary studies" (Vizenor 2008: 11). Vizenor's (ibid.) work is an important contribution to the theoretical premise of this research. It helps to narrow the reader's focus to the experience of settler-colonialism, of cultural genocide, and social marginalization occurring in the Americas.

Anti-colonialism challenges the politics of dispossession that are at the root of self-determination and sovereignty for First Nations peoples and many other Indigenous groups. Simpson (2004) writes, "[a]nticolonial strategies for the recovery of Traditional Indigenous Knowledge systems require a deconstruction of the colonial thinking and its relation to [Indigenous Knowledge]" (p. 381). This means challenging the legitimacy of colonial authority over land and recognizing its connection to the generation and supremacy of knowledge; generating new knowledge(s) within the frameworks of First Nations epistemologies. In other words, *decolonializing*.

2.2 Moving Toward Decolonization

Decolonization is the repatriation of territory, society, and Indigenous life from the rule of colonial powers (Tuck & Yang 2012; Veracini 2007). It is a process that can best be imagined as working in the opposite direction and to achieve the opposite goals as the policies listed in the previous section. For example, rather than schools designed to eliminate and assimilate cultures, First Nations students would learn in their own traditional language according to their tribe's epistemology. Rather than the expropriation of First Nations' land and the confinement of First Nation's peoples to reserves, traditional territories would be recognized and repatriated by their

rightful inhabitants. To activate and sustain the process of decolonization, a school of thought has to be implemented that adopts Indigenous (in this case First Nations) epistemologies aimed at achieving the goals of decolonization. *Decolonialism* works at deconstructing and dismantling the primacy of western-scientific perspectives with the goal being decolonization. In challenging the role of geography in colonization, geographer Stephen Legg (2017) writes that adopting *decolonialism* means “...challenging the practices that made colonies and which sustain colonial durabilities...” (p. 347).

Decolonialism is a theoretical model used to challenge the modes of generating and legitimating knowledge by privileging the perspectives of Indigenous persons and acknowledging the routes to understanding and knowing held by colonized peoples. Decolonialism is the means of deconstructing the colonial power structures that exist within Western-oriented epistemologies by generating knowledge from *outside* (Grosfogel 2011). In this way it operates in both a localized sense as well as in a macro-oriented sense. Where the goal is the wholesale dismantling of colonialism, the approach is localized and activated through the adoption of spatially specific Indigenous (First Nations) epistemologies.

Perhaps the most well recognized research used to address the work of decolonization and its relationship to Indigenous knowledge and research is Māori scholar, Linda Tuiwei Smith's monograph, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012). Smith lays out the history of research in Indigenous communities from the period of European imperial expansion towards the current projects that are actively working towards redress and understanding for peoples effected by colonization. The monograph calls for the greater participation and recognition of Indigenous researchers in the social sciences by arguing that research has been historically implemented to justify European hegemony and to marginalize the colonized Indigenous people. To alter Western

ideological control over research, Smith calls for the acceptance of knowledge and methodologies that originate outside of the current academic structure (Smith *ibid.*). *Decolonizing Methodologies* makes a case against the damaging and ineffective means by which research has been carried out on Indigenous peoples.

The concept of *decolonizing* methodology outlines the way in which Indigenous communities are reasserting themselves over the institution of research as a social tool (Smith *ibid.*). She offers the oft-quoted observation that, "...research, is one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary ... [t]he ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples" (2012: 1). These excesses refer to the exploitation of Indigenous knowledge for the personal gain of non-Indigenous researchers, and/or the use of research programs that do not align with, or incorporate, Indigenous values to further marginalize communities and justify their oppression (Kovach 2009: 27).

The question remains as to how this research differs from that which is criticized by First Nations and Indigenous scholars. The fact that I am collecting knowledge and reproducing it in an academic project is a point of contention. To counter this, I recognize the restrictions that this poses to the nature of First Nations knowledge(s). Within a theoretical framework formed on anti-colonial thought, this research recognizes and explores avenues (learning, teaching, practicing craft work) where this knowledge can be transmitted between First Nations peoples in their own ways.

2.3 Man Lost, Man Found

In *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004), Frantz Fanon elaborates on a variety of systems of control that have been implemented to disrupt and subdue the Indigenous populations of the colonies.

While physical violence is always a cornerstone of conquest, the author notes:

The monopolistic fraction of the metropolitan bourgeoisie will not support a government whose policy is based solely on the power of arms. What the metropolitan financiers and industrialists expect is not the devastation of the colonial population but the protection of their 'legitimate interests' using economic agreements (P. 27).

Fanon outlines the evolution of the models of European colonial control with significant regard to its capitalist motivations. It is not profitable for nations to simply “wipe out” other populations or to violently subdue them. Rather, the colonies become key markets for exporting goods and are thus sustained as commodity dependent markets. Fanon’s work challenges covert, neoliberal control mechanisms that appear under the guise of globalization and international diplomacy. His writing disrupts the violence of colonial regimes by exposing the mechanisms that work to legitimate control over colonised peoples. It also unveils the capitalist motor that drives colonialism.

Glen Coulthard (2014) recognizes how Marx’s work on the origins of capitalism can be used to develop anti-colonial thoughts and strategies towards the dispossessive policies of colonial regimes. Coulthard suggests that certain incompatibilities between Marxist Theory and Indigenous knowledge(s) can be assuaged through a “...contextual shift... [that] ...takes as its analytical frame the subject of the colonized vis-à-vis the effects of colonial dispossession...” (2014: 11). With this as a departure point for a focus on First Nations craft making, I will be adopting and adapting Marx’s concept of *alienation* as an application for the knowledge generated in this research and as means of linking the crafter to the craft they make.

For theorist Karl Marx, a condition of the modern, market-driven economy (following the Industrial Revolution) was the *alienation* of man.⁹ The alienation of man occurs as a reduction of the properties that distinguish humanity, namely, the way that one interacts with and adapts the physical world to survive, live, and progress. Marx described this alienation in four consecutive steps:

1. **The Alienation of Labour** – As a worker, a person must sell their labour to earn a wage and support themselves.
2. **The Alienation of the Object** – The focus of the alienated labour is the production of an object that is no longer a product of the worker, it becomes a product of the entity that employs them.
3. **The Alienation of *Species-Being*** – Marx’s species-being is a concept related to a person’s inherent creative capacities, their human nature, their presence in, and connection to, the natural world.
4. **The Alienation of Man from Man** – The final stage is that a person becomes atomized in the modern world, separated from other people, isolated ([1844] 1983:131-146).

There are several presuppositions within Marx’s theoretical work that aid this research. The most important of these tenets is the connection between human beings and our own creative capacities. The idea that the product of a person’s effort belongs to them, that it is essential to their existence, is key to the examination of craft making as an activity through which a person is self-realized. As Marxist scholar Erich Fromm writes, “[w]ork is for him [Marx] the active relatedness of man to nature, the creation of a new world, including the creation of man himself” (1961:47). In this light, craft production (as a product of one’s creative endeavours) is an essential component of the human condition.

⁹ Using the term *man* or *mankind* refers to humanity as a whole and is not to be interpreted with any gender bias.

As a departure point for the exploration of First Nations craft making in contemporary times, Marx's concept of alienation provides a state of being upon which the efforts of traditional craftspeople can be reflected. From her Nishnaabeg¹⁰ perspective, Leanne Simpson (2017) similarly criticizes capitalism writing, "Nishnaabeg is a society of makers, rather than a society of consumers. This is the foundation of our self-determination and freedom – producing everything we need in our families..." (p. 80). Although intimately tied to the now-defunct Eurocentric ideals of linear social progress,¹¹ the work of Marx is valuable in this research to understand how the productive capacities of First Nations craft makers can disrupt colonialism.

2.4 The Material, the Craft, and the Narrative

The substantive focus for this research is the creation of material culture focusing on craft and craftsmanship. Tim Dant defines material culture as something that comes into being through a process where, "[t]hings, both natural and man-made, are appropriated into human culture in such a way that they re-present the social relations of culture, standing in for other human beings, carrying values, ideas, and emotions..." (1999:1). Under this set of features, the term *material culture* can be applied to anything from a trail through the mountains, to a video game controller, or a specific stone. These are all physical things that can be imbued with a specific set of social rules, meanings, and relationships that are representative of humanity's interaction with the physical world.

¹⁰ Although none of the participants in this research are Nishnaabeg, Leanne Simpson's observation of a non-capitalist society bears some commensurability with the cultures of the participants explored in this research.

¹¹ The idea that the progress of mankind moves in a linear direction from less advanced to more advanced over time. Blackfoot scholar Leroy Little Bear explains it best writing, "[i]n contrast to Aboriginal value systems, one can summarize the value systems of western Europeans as being linear and singular, static, and objective." He goes on to say, "[t]he linearity manifests itself in terms of a social organization that is hierarchical in terms of both structure and power" (2000: 82).

Within the realm of material culture, *craft goods* exist as objects that are designed and produced by the same person, that is, the craft maker maintains control over all aspects of production of the project (Campbell 2005:27). Defined in this way, a craft is used often in the realm of *usable* objects. Therefore, a bowl or a bracelet may be considered craft, but a painting or sculpture would not. The distinction between the two realms of creative output is often fluid

It is important to recognize craft work as a productive mode that is distinct from large-scale, industrial mass production. Craft work is a skilled enterprise, normally undertaken by a single worker able to practice some measure of autonomy in the process of making. Conversely, industrial production represents a de-skilled,¹² routinized form of production. Together, many workers in a factory-type setting undertake a small and specialized role in the creation of a finished product. The product of industrial production is alienated from the producer, where the craft good remains as a physical representation of the crafter's unique, personal investment. Therefore, the craft good becomes a reflection of a unique, and often culturally specific, network of social conditions, part of a larger personal narrative.

I explore the capacity for objects to engage and contribute to both a personal narrative and a broader, cultural narrative. Cultural theorist Ian Woodward (2009) outlined this capacity in three ways: (1) how people talk about objects in the context of their lives, (2) how objects appear as signifiers of broader social topics, and; (3) how objects direct or narrate human activity (p.61). Each of these concepts provide an important perspective into the significance of craft cultures and the power of narrative represented through material objects.

¹² *De-skilling* is a term referring to the changes in labour that have occurred since the industrial revolution. Rather than having a single, skilled worker capable of performing all the tasks necessary to produce a good, many workers each perform a single, specialized task in the pursuit of increasing productive efficiency (Wood 1981).

The first category (*How People Talk About Objects in the Context of Their Lives*) addresses the stories told about the objects. It serves as the basis for the mode of data collection for this project. In face-to-face interviews, participants tell stories about their interactions with crafts, learning about them, designing, producing, and transferring objects. Investigating and comparing the primary data received from research participants about the role of crafts in their lives, allows other themes to emerge.

The second category (*How Objects Appear as Signifiers of Broader Social Topics*) can be recognized in the thematic analysis of the participants' stories and situating these themes in the broader context of modern society. Exploring the stories of the craft makers in regard to what has or does influence their production opens up a discussion on the broader social topics represented in their work according to their own perspectives.

The final aspect (*The Way Objects Themselves Narrate*), is limited in scope. Woodward (2009) explores modern technological advances and how objects act to displace human actors. His examination of this aspect fails to recognize two different ideas about the way that objects narrate. First, objects narrate rituals of human behaviour around them. This applies not just to the sacred or ceremonial objects, but also to mundane or secular examples of material culture like architectural designs that direct the movement of people in certain locations.

Within an Indigenous context, Woodward's framework also fails to account for the animate characteristics that are imbued in all things. Material objects such as pipes, eagle feathers, and head dresses are treated in Indigenous cultures as living things (Friesen and Friesen 2008; Murray 2009; Rose 2017). This research can expand on Woodward's original analyses that are constrained by a Eurocentric perspective by introducing stories and perspectives from outside of the western academic establishment.

Van Dommelen's (2006) research on adopting post-colonial perspectives into research in the social sciences, recognizes the literary bias that appears in research on material culture such as Woodward's. He writes, "...from a Post-colonial perspective, paying more attention to material culture is important in two respects ... it will help redress the literary bias in studying colonial situations..." (p.120), seeing material culture as a story written by its makers that is buried under what can be called a historical hegemony that privileges the narratives of the colonizers while excluding Indigenous voices and cultural contributions.

The practical approach emphasized in Van Dommelen's research (2006) looks at the way that material cultural studies from a post-colonial perspective, "...expands the range of the media in which colonial situations are represented beyond text and illustrations" (p. 120). An example of this can be seen, as well, in the work of Guindon (2015) who examines the changes to material culture and the adoption of new technologies by the Mistissini Cree in Quebec. He asserts, "[t]aking into account the cultural perspective of Aboriginal peoples to define their technologies can help challenging well-established anthropological perspectives and contribute to decolonizing their histories" (p.93). Like Van Dommelen (2006), Guindon (2015) utilizes a decolonial perspective in his examination of material culture. Doing so permits him to access a lived experience and history embedded in a people's cultural interactions with their physical world through a narrative embodied by material culture.

Reading stories through material culture recognizes an avenue for human agency and cultural resistance (Guindon 2015). For people that have largely been excluded from mainstream discourse, material culture is a way of recording a person's or a people's history in a way that fits with their own specific beliefs, cultures, and practices. Material culture combines the physical realities of a person's life with the ideas and knowledge that shape their perception of that physical

reality. In yet another way, craft production and the value placed on authenticity permit minority groups to nurture a sense of cultural pride within the increasingly complex network of power relations represented within modernity (Dlaske 2014; Krmpotich et al. 2016). As Dlaske (2014) reports, handicraft industries entering late modern commercial networks have to negotiate competing forces. On one hand is individualized competition for craft production; while on the other hand, entering commercial markets creates a space to establish cultural presence and standing (Dlaske 2014, pp. 595-596).

Dlaske (2014) is optimistic concerning the synthesis of traditionally inspired craft work with neoliberal economics. However, this research is focused less on economic expansion into the capitalist market than the maintenance and survival of traditional social structures and craft work. James M. Bayman (2002) provides an analysis of a model more fitting to the aims of this project with his investigation on the Prestige Goods Economy Model. This model explores the regulation and distribution of craft goods in traditional power networks, instead of focusing on modern economic viability. Bayman concludes, “Among the Hohokam, at least, power was materialized through ideologies that imbued craft economies with meanings vital to social reproduction” (2002:88). This perspective allows craft industry or economies to be investigated in the context of the Indigenous community and recognizes variation between First Nations cultures.

The existing literature provides a number of directions to pursue, thus expanding the current body of sociological research that exists with regard to craft work and material culture in local First Nations communities. This includes both considerations on the nature of craft making and on Indigenous knowledges and how to represent them.

3.0 Methodology

This research examines how knowledge is embedded, organized, and transmitted through the production of traditional craft goods in by individuals from several Treaty 7 communities. This research aims to expand upon the idea that the craft maker embeds narratives into material culture and to how one might come to understand these narratives. Colin Campbell (2005) recognizes, that traditionally, the view of craft work among early social critics was, "... the most quintessential of all human activity... seen as ennobling, humanizing, and, hence, the ideal means through which individuals could express their humanity" (p. 25). With this in mind, this research seeks to identify the elements of human experience in the creation of craft goods. This is opposed to the industrial production of goods which, according to Karl Marx, alienates these human characteristics and the meaning of the goods (Marx [1844]1983).

Traditional craft goods referred to in this research range from moccasins, beadwork, and powwow¹³ regalia (clothing worn while dancing at powwows or for ceremonial purposes) to headdresses and tipis. Craft goods are based on the traditions that have been maintained in First Nations societies as a part of a collective identity (Battiste & Henderson 2000). To identify and understand the stories therein, this research determined how crafts are made, and the significance of the objects in their historical and contemporary contexts. The perspectives of the people that create them and the meaning that the craft makers hold about the objects is examined. Qualitative data, collected in the form of stories, will be analyzed to search for themes that illustrate how traditional knowledges or narratives are represented in crafts.

¹³ Powwows have become cultural events through economic promotion where Indigenous peoples of North America gather to celebrate exhibit traditional dance and songs. Participants compete in a variety of dance categories.

Margaret Kovach notes, “The current field of qualitative research is an inclusive place” (2009:27). Since the research takes place within First Nations communities, this form of inquiry also permits the exploration of a second, social justice perspective that will address historical faults in the collection of data in Indigenous communities (Smith 2012). The pursuit of social justice through critical inquiry comes down to the use of methodology that favours Indigenous knowledge, the way knowledge is produced, presented and shared, the structures that inform the generation of new knowledge, and the traditional sources of this knowledge.

Five semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with open and closed-ended questions were used so participants could provide their own descriptions and testimonies that address their experiences, practices, and environments as they relate to craft making. I chose to conduct these interviews face-to-face, as meeting in person lends itself to the decolonial perspective I wish to maintain throughout this research, as Smith (2012) describes, “the seen face, that is [to] present yourself to people face-to-face” (p. 124) imparts respect for and protection of the rights and sensitivities of the participants. This does not automatically make an interview a *decolonial* interview, but it adds to contextual and relational objectives that are necessary for the research.

These interviews were supported by unobtrusive, written observations of the meetings that gave the interviews greater depth by adding context, thus, placing them within a living reality. This multi-method approach is supported by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) “... as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation” (p. 2). Additionally, the multiple qualitative methods employed (interviewing and observation of context, body language and content) fit substantively with the creative aspect of craft work and material culture. The detail and level of insight provided by the combined methods were used to generate data that *breathes* – knowledge

that is a living, vocal entity, consistent with the Indigenous worldview narrated throughout the participants' works.

3.1 Exploring an Indigenous Paradigm: Relationality and Its Philosophical Assumptions

An anti-colonial methodology identifies an important paradigmatic concept that will be used in this project. It illustrates the presentation and representation of an Indigenous worldview in a research context. This methodology, specifically taken from Kaupapa Maori research (Smith 2012), refers to an understanding of the relational aspect of all things, including the content, means of gathering information and participation in an Indigenous research project; It is a lens that can bear commonality across literature regarding Indigeneity¹⁴ (Romm 2015). Anti-colonial methodology acknowledges and attempts to understand Indigenous ways of knowing and *being* in the living world where the physical and metaphysical are inseparable. As such, anti-colonial methodology in Indigenous research should only be applied to research that does not contribute to the larger body of detached theorizing that is so prevalent in current studies undertaken by non-Indigenous persons (Carlson 2008). Anti-colonial methodology seeks to honor Indigenous ways of knowing and being by participating in research conducive to depicting the importance of cultural identity, beliefs, values systems (Carlson 2008).

Ontologically,¹⁵ this methodology recognizes the complex networks of relations that exist between all things, living and non-living, or as Fonda (2011) writes, "...a great deal of identity and well-being comes from the sense of relationship to land and to the creatures and objects within the environment" (p. 4). This ideology counters any attempt at objectivity in research by recognizing that, at any time, the researcher is related to the subject of research (Romm 2015). The

¹⁴ Indigeneity: being Indigenous; a member (or descendant) of a group of people present in a given territory prior to the arrival of a foreign ethnic or cultural group (Sandberg McGuinne 2014)

¹⁵ *Ontology* as a discipline deals with the nature of existence. Here, the term is used to describe how an anti-colonial methodology will be adopted in the research to understand themes that emerge in the data.

participatory aspect of this approach facilitates an atmosphere of collaboration, respect and reciprocity not generally seen in Western research projects. Indigenous ethos permeates all aspects of anti-colonial research, leading to a project that takes place in an in-between space, where dichotomous perspectives and beliefs are able to interact (Smith 2012). This is where observation and context are made key in the collection of data and generation of data – to navigate these networks by means of an epistemology¹⁶ that, again, values this relational aspect.

The epistemology that guides this methodology understands that things are known in their connection with other things. Romm (2015) points out that, “...while Western-oriented epistemologies may be inclined to devalue communal mode of thinking, what is specific about Indigenous modes of knowing is that they are *intentionally communally oriented*” (p. 421). The idea that knowing is *intentionally and communally oriented* demonstrates how the orientation of Indigenous community values relates to the way Indigenous knowledge is produced and justified. Nothing can be understood in isolation and *knowing* must take into account how things are related or connected to each other and to the community. Anti-colonial methodology embraces Indigenous ways of knowing by actively seeking to participate in research related to the epistemology and values of the culture. In terms of this research, that means actively participating and re-shaping all aspects of the research to meet the needs outlined and defined by the study participants.

Much needs to be taken into consideration when analyzing knowledge contributed by Indigenous participants. In practical terms this means that one must be able to convey, as authentically and accurately as possible, the context of the participants who are providing data to the research. For example, the researcher must take into account a participant’s social position in their community, thus the inclusion of the participant’s profiles. This knowledge relates the

¹⁶ *Epistemology* is literally “the study of knowledge”. It explores the nature of knowledge and the way that knowledge is generated and legitimized.

participant to other community members and their ability to express or share their stories and knowledge. Journaling or recording information about the meetings, including the ephemeral and contextual characteristics¹⁷ enables the generated data to be as holistic as possible in these circumstances. Philosophical assumptions are mobilized through the adoption of a framework aimed towards decolonizing scientific modes of inquiry.

3.2 Operationalizing an Anti/Decolonial Project

This research project analyzes data collected from First Nations people in and around Calgary. The methodology that guided how data was gathered and interpreted had to be appropriate to accurately represent the special relationship to knowledge that is maintained in these communities. A critical methodology¹⁸ is used to investigate and report the knowledge and experience of participants in order to contribute to the decolonizing project. In a broad sense, "...the decolonizing project seeks to reimagine and rearticulate power, change, and knowledge through a multiplicity of epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies¹⁹" (Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012:III). This means challenging the traditional Eurocentric perspectives regarding the nature of reality and the legitimacy of knowledge throughout the research process.

The more difficult part of this exercise was applying the principles of decolonizing work practically throughout the course of the research. One way of approaching the research within the decolonizing framework is to pursue Participatory Action Research (PAR) by creating a project that emphasizes the self-determination or agency of the participants involved (Zavala 2013). PAR

¹⁷ This accounts for the physical setting of the meetings that will not be readily observable in transcripts. The tone of the conversation, events leading up to the meeting, etc. Referring to the *holism* of the data means giving it depth and breadth, accounting for circumstances related to the meetings.

¹⁸ The choice to use a *critical methodology* in this project reflects the aims of the research in challenging power relations between Indigenous groups and academia that privilege institutional knowledge above traditional Indigenous ways of knowing

¹⁹ Along with epistemology (the theory of knowledge) and ontology (the theory of being), axiology is an inquiry into or theory of the values attached to ways of knowing (Hart: 1971).

research dismantles the hierarchy of the researcher/participant relationship permitting research participants to guide and shape the research process as the project moves along. In many ways, the use of a methodology that emerges out of Decolonization Theory in the context of Indigenous groups in Canada and focuses on building a relationship in the community rather than explicit techniques of data collection which is where a PAR influence emerges in this methodological program.

Putting all of this into practice, especially as a non-Indigenous researcher, meant learning and incorporating specific protocols and perspectives during the research process (Roulston 2010). The term *protocols*, refers to the specific processes or customs that must be followed to gain access to First Nations communities and individuals for the purpose of sharing knowledge. These protocols vary from community to community, but generally rely on sharing the proposed objectives of the research with Elders (individuals who hold high social standing in the community) and outlining the benefit that the research pursuit has for the community. This also meant observing certain traditional customs, for example, when meeting with an Elder or knowledge holder in a First Nations community, tobacco²⁰ is offered as a gift, observing both the social status and their sacred belief systems. In this respect, entry into the community encompasses a process of sharing and relationship building with community members and participants based on these traditional protocols and the assistance of community contacts. In other words, the researcher enters into a process of socialization, observing that, “Decolonization does not exist without a framework that centers and privileges Indigenous life, community, and epistemology Indigenous life, community, and epistemology” (Sium et al. 2012:II).

²⁰ Burning tobacco is a spiritual ritual used by many First Nations groups. The smoke from the tobacco carries one’s prayers to the Creator. Therefore, tobacco is given as a gesture to recognize the value of the knowledge to be shared.

The next step towards pursuing a *decolonizing* strategy in the project is sharing the research with the community. The knowledge, stories, and practices that are recorded in the research are perceived in the Indigenous view as still belonging to the individuals who shared them (Davis, 2003), crediting the participants in this way adds a layer of accountability to the research to properly represent the experiences and stories of the participants. To fulfill this step of the methodological program, ongoing communication with participants, consultation regarding analysis, and returning to the community with the knowledge generated was necessary.

3.3 Sampling

The sample of participants was initiated through key community contacts in the respective communities. I enlisted the help of local contacts to arrange the preliminary meetings with people of interest, that is, people who they know that are involved in making crafts. The key community contacts that agreed to assist me in this project are personal friends who are respected in their communities and are aware of the necessary procedures and precautions that must be considered in the pursuit of this research.

Following preliminary meetings with key contacts, a snowball sampling strategy was implemented so that I could arrange subsequent meetings with potential participants. Snowball Sampling (sampling by employing the social networks of initial participants to identify further participants) was the most effective method as each of the communities that were involved in the research are rural and lack a centralized population that would facilitate canvassing.

I interviewed five individual crafters (four of whom represented each of the Treaty 7 nations²¹ as well as an Anishinaabe crafter originally from Ontario). This diversified the sample

²¹ The three tribes present at the signing of Treaty 7 in 1877 at Blackfoot Crossing were the Blackfoot, the Tsuut'ina, a distinct group who speak a Dene language, and the Stoney Nakoda, of Siouan descent. While all of the groups are considered *Plains Tribes*, each have a distinct culture and cosmology.

along the lines of the language and tribal identities that are recognized in the region. This approach broadened the representativeness of the data that was collected and recognized the heterogeneity between First Nations groups. I scheduled interviews of one or two hours each with participants to fully engage with the information gathered and knowledge that was shared. My preliminary meetings showed that these sessions would produce an abundance of information within that time frame.

The only criteria that participants had to meet is that they self-identified as Indigenous; were actively engaged in crafting traditional goods, and they were willing to share their experiences. Of interest to the project was how the traditions and cultural knowledge are embedded, transmitted and organized through a network of relationships and how the *cultural* identity was structured and maintained by these activities.

3.4 Interview – Storytelling

The Indigenous approach to being interviewed or sharing knowledge is referred to as *storytelling*. Linda Smith (2012) writes, “[t]he story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story” (p. 145). Storytelling adheres to a social constructionist perspective of how we develop our understanding of ourselves, our surroundings, and others. Indigenous scholar Lynne Davis (2004) writes:

We “story” our lives using plots and characters. We not only “story” ourselves and others, but we are “storied” by others ... we may re-story our lives developing a different understanding of what has happened on this journey. Used in this way, “story” is our means to understand the world (p. 2).

Storytelling provided the most straightforward way to collect the information required for this project. For this to be effective, there is an emphasis required that the interviewer establish a strong

rapport with the interviewee and to have some background knowledge available to. The latter can be achieved easily enough through the process of preliminary meetings and consultation with contacts. Interview/storytelling sessions were audio-recorded for later transcription.

A semi-structured schedule for the interview/storytelling (Appendix A) was developed through a continual dialogue with various contacts. The main concerns for that portion of the research were how the crafter came to learn their craft; how they passed on or transmitted this knowledge; the meaning of the different elements or parts of their craft good(s); what the particular crafted good was used for in their culture; and how, or if, the crafter personalized what they created. These themes provided the foundation for understanding how individuals saw the organization of the knowledge they held.

One of the significant challenges that was encountered was re-presenting the stories accurately in an academic setting. As Davis (2004) observes, “[t]he university is a particular site of tension in terms of recording and disseminating Indigenous knowledge, experience, and imagination” (p. 9). To counter this charge, it will be necessary for me to engage with participants in a continued consultation throughout the analysis and to share the research once it has been completed (Davis 2004; Roulston 2010; Smith 2012). Consulting and sharing the knowledge generated in the research with the participants that contributed to it counters the misrepresentation of the data by enabling an *active voice*²² on the part of the participant.

3.5 Research Ethics and Informed Consent

Participants maintain the right to have their information and identity remain anonymous. If participants chose to withdraw from the study, they had the option to do so and to have their data

²² I define “active voice” here as the presence in the research data of the participant. It is an effort to retain context and maintain accuracy that may be lost through continued revision and analysis of the data throughout the research process.

erased from the project as well. Electronically recorded data was stored on locked devices (iPhone, laptop) and was only accessible to my supervisor (Dr. Cora Voyageur) and myself.

The ethical dimensions of this project extend beyond individual participation. They refer to the nature and goals of the project and the protection of knowledge, individuals, and community.

The main ethical points are outlined below:

- Observing cultural protocols to access and manoeuvre within the community
- Building relationships with participants
- Acknowledging that the rights to the information belong to the community or individual
- Sharing credit for the research.

The preceding points are broad considerations adapted for this project from the literature consulted on performing research in Indigenous communities (Davis 2004; Denzin, Lincoln & Smith 2008; Smith 2012).

The first point (observing cultural protocols to access and manoeuvre within the community) deals with the necessity of approaching the community with respect for their customs and conventions. Elders and traditional knowledge holders in First Nations communities hold a revered and privileged status within the group; Access to their knowledge and participation was instrumental to this research. Protocols serve to assure community members that research is being pursued in a way that is beneficial to the people and values the traditions that they honour.

The second point is derived from the first and observes that the researcher must build relational ties within the community. This process is two-fold. Firstly, it makes the researcher more accountable to the community for the final product when he or she has written an account of cultural narratives and addressed specific cultural themes. Secondly, it conditions the researcher to acknowledge the perspectives of the individuals, to adopt sociologist Max Weber's concept

of *verstehen*²³ (to realize the issues that might be produced through the inquiry process and how best to present them). Using an anti-colonial methodology, wherein the researched become the researchers, helps mitigate the likelihood of issues arising in terms of the inquiry process, themes, and conclusions. However, as the final draft was written by a settler colonial, in a non-Indigenous language, the authentic perspective and knowledge of the participants can not accurately be presented.

Third, recognizing the rights to the shared information is critical. It is important to acknowledge the inherent value and scarcity of traditional Indigenous knowledge. In groups where oral traditions have been maintained as a means for cultural transmission, individuals who hold the knowledge of customs, language, and history are valued. These individuals act as encyclopaedias of their culture and history, preserving and maintaining knowledge for future generations (Calliou 2004). Their knowledge contains significant value within the community. Therefore, the research must observe that the collected data, as well as, to a degree, that which is *generated*, is a resource that is controlled by the participants.

Finally, sharing credit for the research produced recognizes that research is an endeavour of self-interest, in Western society, that generates potential rewards for the researcher. Whether it be through funding, recognition, or promotion in his or her field, the researcher is a beneficiary of the research. Participants must also share in the potential rewards. In each of the preliminary meetings I was posed with the question of how this research would benefit the participants' communities. Imparting the importance of anti-colonial research methodologies in Indigenous

²³ Max Weber's concept of empathic engagement with other social actors was a technique "...which would allow us to get into the inner sense of how individuals subjectively interpreted and chose what they were doing" (Allen: 2004 p. 72)

research and sharing the credit for the completed research is one way to recognize the investment of the participants and award value to their participation.

Throughout the research process I relied upon, and consulted with, participants, contacts, and informants to guide the direction of the project. This project emphasizes the axiological foundation in its design, thus placing weight on the pursuit of an ethical and value-laden structure. For example, the priority given to the significance and authenticity of participants' stories is paramount to adhering to the Indigenous value systems that honour this knowledge and to legitimate the knowledge that is further generated from it.

The pronouncement of the axiological assumption in the project gives the work an explicit social justice goal much in line with the *transformative* research pursued by Mertens (2010, 2012). With this in mind, the research was collaborative and participatory at all stages in a manner that resolves ethical concerns of the participants and satisfies organizational codes of conduct recognized in the academy.

4.0 Analysis

A blend of narrative inquiry and thematic analysis was used in the analysis stage to help in drawing a complete, detailed illustration of traditional craft production. Throughout the data collection process, field notes were used to reflect on how the stories and themes were linked and to assist in open-coding my data for potential themes. Combinations of observations and story data were used to fully illustrate the themes that were captured. Tables were constructed to help in arranging portions of data that had been collected in order to better organize the information.

To understand the cultural narratives connected to craft work one benefits from knowing the environment that surrounds and influences them. The craft work discussed in the interviews had a number of influences. These influences contribute to an individual's conception of their role in the universe (as demonstrated in the themes of spirituality and animals) and help to inform how one should act in their community (demonstrated by the theme of social structure). In addition, the themes present in the realm of craft work are indicative of a value system within the communities and cultures.

Three major themes will guide the analysis. They are: (1) the role that craft work plays in sustaining cultural narratives; (2) the content of the stories that are embedded in the craft culture; and (3) resistance to mainstream culture by preventing or opposing the deviation of traditional ways of craft making.

4.1 Results

Journal entries were used to record place and time of meetings and to describe the ephemeral, contextual elements that would have otherwise escaped the audio-recordings; following an anti-colonial approach to research in an Indigenous context. The transcripts and journal entries were

reviewed for themes in an initial, open-coding process²⁴ as data collection was being carried out and helped to determine that thematic saturation²⁵ had been reached after five interviews.

After coding, the transcripts were reviewed again to aggregate themes. The data produced five themes listed below and the characteristics that I used to identify them in the transcripts:

1. **Spirituality**: references to The Creator, the afterlife, or spiritual beliefs. Participants spoke about their relationship to their communities or their culture through the lens of their spirituality.
2. **Social structures**: these were responses that referred to an adherence to traditional social norms or codes, the maintenance of internal social structures, and community cohesion through ritual and practice.
3. **Animals**: research participants spoke about the significance of certain animals, their relationship to animals and nature, and animals' roles within the culture.
4. **Family**: This theme was related to social structure but was differentiated from social structure in the coding when responses included references to kinship.
5. **Resistance**: This theme was less explicitly illustrated in the data but consisted of participants' responses that were aimed more towards sustaining their culture in the face of mainstream pressure and historical injustices. These included the deleterious effects on Indigenous culture resulting from the residential school era and various government policies that restricted or outlawed the observance of traditional customs in Indigenous communities, i.e. the ban on Sun Dances.

²⁴ The open-coding was done throughout the data collection phase, during and immediately after interviews when I was transcribing the audio recordings. I made notes on similarities between interviews and points of interest, and these initial themes were used to organize topics throughout the data that had been collected.

²⁵ The term thematic saturation designates a point in which themes identified in open-coding were repeated in subsequent interviews.

Besides these five themes there were a number of more nuanced, meta-themes²⁶ that were observable in the data but not necessarily reducible to single-word themes. These broader themes dealt with the way the information was shared and the organization of the information rather than with the content of the information. The participants' manner of relating knowledge was often indirect. The interviews did not proceed in a simple question/answer pattern, rather, the participants responded broadly to the interview questions with stories. Instead of giving short direct answers to questions, the participants painted a picture and embedded their answers to my inquiries in the context of their experience. For example, questions about learning skills related to craft making were often answered with childhood stories of visits with family. This not only demonstrated intergenerational patterns of transmission but also illustrates the necessity of the context in which these skills were handed down. They reflect the conditions of life for First Nations and their connections with the natural world and a reverence for the value of teachers.

Another meta-thematic characteristic of the data, was the irreducibility of the information. The participants' broad responses highlighted the interconnectivity of the themes that appeared in the data. While the five themes mentioned above were identifiable in the data, it is important to recognize that they were situated in the context of the lived experience of the individual participant. The best way to understand this scenario is to imagine each of the participants and their responses as an individual stream. Each of these streams has points where they converge with others, which became the themes that I will expand on later in the analysis. The other points of divergence reflect the unique individual experiences and connections to their craft work and their history. The latter

²⁶ The meta-themes that I refer to were not subjects that were explicitly discussed more or less, but rather the observations I made during the interviews regarding the participants' relation to the knowledge that they shared that guided what we talked about and how.

is important in demonstrating that despite commonalities, each participant had a distinct connection and story.

4.1.1 Craft Makers' Summary

Of the five participants that were involved in this research project, three were male and two were female. There were some differences in how the craft makers pursued their craft making practice that could potentially be linked to gender roles. For example, as a mother, one crafter used her craft making to provide traditional attire for her husband and children. Thus, her participation in craft making had a maternal and familial focus based on the roles typically ascribed to her gender.

Although the craft workers were skilled in many areas of craft making, each focused on particular activities in which they specialized or preferred. Two men in the study specialized in headdresses, an activity that required a prolonged investment of time and cultural participation for them to earn the rights to make these articles (the rights or authority to make culturally significant items are discussed further on in the chapter). Another craft maker specialized in quill work, a delicate and labour-intensive activity that was highly-valued by collectors. Apparel was the focus of another craft maker who practiced her skills by making outfits for her family to wear. The focus of the last craft maker was on tools and traditional items (knives and spears) using antlers.

Four of the participants were married. Of those four, only one of them discussed how marriage played a role in her knowledge and practice of craft making. For that participant, marriage meant learning her husband's culture. This process was facilitated by her in-laws as she was socialized into her new community. Aside from this example, marital status was not mentioned specifically in regard to the participants' craft making practice.

Each of the participants employed their cultural knowledge or craft making practice as a vocation. However, only one pursued craft making as a principal source of income. Each craft

maker worked, or participated in, community-oriented advocacy, or consultation-based activities on and off reserve. These positions entailed language consultation with linguistics scholars and youth engagement activities that were held within the participants' communities.

Fewer than half of the craft makers were living in the communities that they grew up in. One participant lived with her partner in Calgary having moved west from Ontario. Another participant married into a family from a different Treaty 7 nation. Yet another participant lived off reserve to be near his workplace in Banff. Their connection to their families and communities remained strong despite their location. This connection (illustrated in detail further on in the analysis) was maintained through channels provided by craft work.

The perfection of skills needed in practicing craft is a time intensive project. This investment of time is commensurate to the quality and significance that the finished product bears. It is a process of continual learning and refinement of method and material, design and technique. Since all the crafts are handmade, the craft makers were always honing their abilities and learning or developing new techniques or designs. The craft makers were middle-aged or older (I did not ask participants for their specific age, but they were all old enough to have adult children). This can indicate the amount of time that goes into learning one's craft and acquiring all of the knowledge that goes with it. All but one of the craft makers had been making crafts for an extended period of time. This time span ranged from 20 to 50 years, and most began in their youth. The craft maker who started participating at a later age still focused on his experiences as a youth and learned from older family members.

Participants also taught their craft to others and served as representatives of the traditions that they practiced. This illustrates how the craft making knowledge was transmitted to the

participants. The form that the knowledge takes and who can access the craft making knowledge is illustrated by the participants' stories.

Table 1: Craft Makers by Profile Information

Name	B.S.	E.W.	L.D.	T.C.	Anon
Age	Middle age/Senior	Middle aged/ Senior	Middle aged	Senior	Senior/Middle age
Age started	Youth	Youth	Youth	Youth	Adult
Reason(s) for Craft Work	Ceremonial, carry on tradition, community focus	Family needs (cultural transmission to children)	Commercial, ceremonial	Spiritual, ceremonial	Community/culture focus
Mentors/Teachers	Older generations of own family. (Grandma)	Older generations of family and in-laws (mother, mother-in-law)	Older generations of family. (Grandma)	Older generations of family. (Uncle)	Older generation of family. (Uncle).
Teaches Others	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
Pupils/Students	Children/Family members	Children/Youth (in workshops)	Friends/Family	Interested individuals (Indigenous)	Teaches language/culture classes at community school. Unsure if offers craft instruction.
Craft Specialty	Headdresses	Apparel	Quill work	Headdresses	Knives/Tools
Makes Crafts For	Community, Family	Community, Family, Customers	Community, Customers	Community	Community

Source: Moccasin Tracks Research, 2018

Table 2: Craft Makers by Craft

Craft								
Craft Maker	Headdresses	Pipes	Beadwork	Moccasins	Tools	Tipis	Tipi Furniture	Contemporary Items
Bruce S.	X		X	X	X		X	
Lee D.	X	X	X	X				X
Tom C. B.	X	X						
Elk Woman			X	X		X		X
Anonymous					X			

Source: Moccasin Tracks Research, 2018

4.2 Learning to Read - Cultural Literacy

This portion of the analysis focuses on the question: How do participants learn about their craft? In short, this section examines how knowledge about craft making was acquired by these particular crafters and how their knowledge is shared with others who wish to learn.

To understand the narratives embedded in traditional craft making practices, first, one must understand how these stories are told and then learn about the voices that echo through the work. Those voices belong to the crafters and the experiences that have made significant impacts in their lives. This section answers the following questions about the participants and their work:

- Who are the people who make crafts?
- How is the knowledge of craft making transmitted?
- Who can access the craft making knowledge?
- How are traditional crafts made?

4.2.1 The Role of Family in Cultural Transmission

Family connections were the most common feature of the participants' stories about their involvement in making crafts. The participants referred to their kinship relations as their teachers when I asked them how they learned to make crafts. The participants were taught the crafts they made by family members. The stories they shared demonstrated that their family relationships were important to them and they described themselves as: sons, daughters, grandchildren, parents, siblings, aunts and uncles. Family members of the participants were also the people whom they made crafts for, such as dance regalia. They were a source of encouragement and inspiration for the crafts being made as well as a key link to maintaining traditions, culture and craft making knowledge.

When speaking of her education as a crafter, Elk Woman, made the link between craft making and family in the following way:

My biggest teacher is my mom and my grandma and my husband's grandma. Umm... why I say my husband's grandma is because, um... you know, she came from the treaty... treaty era and my grandparents too, hey, but in order to learn this culture she was my teacher on this side, yep. – Elk Woman, Siksika, 05 November 2016, Tsuut'ina

Elk Woman shared her stories from a family-oriented perspective as the roles that she inhabited in her community were all linked to a maternal-type identity. Her *mother* role focused on child-rearing and duties to maintain the family structure and pass down customs and traditional knowledge to future generations. The focus of her craft making enterprise was to outfit and/or equip her husband and children with material objects (such as buckskin outfits and beaded items) that would help to solidify their status and identity in the community. Beyond her own immediate family, she played the role of a teacher with the cultural imperative of strengthening the links between her community members and their language and history. Craft making skills (and the crafts that she produced) were viewed as one aspect of a greater cultural milieu such as history and language being passed on by senior family members.

Another participant who chose to remain anonymous, said:

I'm setting my mind on what I see being done by my grandfather way back. – Anonymous, 27 November 2016

Craft making is an intergenerational endeavor in First Nations communities, with family members from previous generations often serving as strong role models and knowledge holders for the intergenerational participants. This is echoed by noted Tsuut'ina elder, Bruce Starlight, who responded to the question about his apprenticeship as a craft maker by naming two instructors:

My Granny taught me how to do the backrests, my dad showed me how to do the war bonnets... – B. Starlight, Tsuut'ina, 03 August 2016, Tsuut'ina

For Mr. Starlight, craft making instruction came from a variety of family members helping to illustrate how family members take on various specialties depending on their own unique experiences and abilities. Bruce is a respected knowledge holder in a number of areas. Although his specialty is crafting headdresses, he also paints tipis, performs ceremonies, and provides consultation to linguists studying the Tsuut'ina language. He does this above and beyond his numerous other cultural assignments.

Lee Deranger, who is a First Nation crafter, artist and activist who lives in Calgary stated that:

...one of my grannies was one of those old ladies that made the birch bark circle with the birch bark tipi with the little birch bark canoe that sold in the trading post out on the highway and I remember holding the cereal bowl upside down and I remember eventually getting to be the kid that actually cut the bark with a pair of scissors because I was old enough. – L. Deranger, Anishinaabe, 23 September 2016, Calgary

Mrs. Deranger's experience with craft making evolved from her participation in creating marketable goods in a small-scale handicraft industry with her family. There are several factors that made Mrs. Deranger different from the other participants. Out of all the participants that I met, Mrs. Deranger was the only individual who mentioned marketing her craft work to buyers as a consumer good. She lives in an urban area, far from her traditional territory, and does not belong to the Treaty 7 Nations. Mrs. Deranger's participation in craft making bridges a divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews. On one side, she held fast to Indigenous tribal code and custom by adhering to the guiding principles and teachings of her traditional culture and teachings. This characteristic was present in the discussion regarding the items that she made to serve a strictly Indigenous community (culturally important items such as pipe bags and sometimes headdresses). On the other hand, she adapted her skills and experiences to a non-Indigenous world using art to illustrate themes of Indigeneity in the mainstream and to represent Indigenous voice

in the Canadian political sphere. Mrs. Deranger uses an Indigenous worldview to both contribute to the knowledge generated in Indigenous communities and to bring an awareness to political issues that still circulate in Western society.

Tom Crane Bear is a Blackfoot Elder from the Siksika First Nation. He currently resides in Banff, Alberta where he works as a cultural advisor at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. Mr. Crane Bear's specialty was making headdresses. Easily recognizable, headdresses (also referred to as feather hats or war bonnets) are a significant cultural and ceremonial item in many Indigenous cultures.

Mr. Crane Bear also identified a family member as his teacher when learning his craft skills:

Well, my uncle was a head dress maker and he showed me many things... he was a gifted man in making head dresses and he taught me. I always sit beside him when he makes them and uh... you see, the eyes can't tell lies. – T. Crane Bear, 13 October 2016, Banff.

A strong family connection existed between the study participants and the person (or people) who taught them the craft. Craft making knowledge was passed down between generations of the same family. None of the participants stated that they learned the craft from someone outside the family or a stranger at a craft making workshop.²⁷ Most of the individuals stated that were taught by their grandparents as they were growing up around them.

This supports the notion of intergenerationality, where older generations of the family are recognized as purveyors of traditional knowledge and skills. As a young person, growing up and spending time with the older generations of one's family exposes one to the activities and customs that older generations are engaged in. The generational connection in families is key to learning

²⁷ While none of the participants of this study indicated that they learned in a class or workshop, classes and workshops do take place where craft makers teach traditional skills to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike.

and understanding one's own culture in an Indigenous context. More senior family members play a role in connecting younger generations to their place of being.

Participants noted in their interviews that they continued to teach and pass along the knowledge that they held about craft making to their children, relatives, friends, and youth in the community. Participating in the intergenerational exchange of knowledge, as it relates to craft making, follows an Indigenous worldview that values reciprocity, respect and responsibility that each of these participant's values. The role of the teacher, or *knowledge holder*, is held with high regard, as it means that the individual earned a valued gift and is aiding in the continuation of the culture.

4.2.2 Heritage

Participants are connected to histories, language, and oral histories that stretch back to time immemorial through kinship ties. Participants not only referred to immediate relations but were able recite their lineage. The theme of family was often carried back through generations.

Here, Elk Woman illustrates her connection to her culture through her family's genealogy:

I know my culture and my identity. Me, I go back right to Chief Crowfoot who signed the treaty, that's where mine is. My husband's goes back right to Bullhead, the one that signed treaty. You know, that – I know my genealogy on both sides of my – my mom and dad. So, I know where I come from and I'm very proud of it and then I can, you know, sense back, hey. And it's not just saying, "Okay you're a great-great grandfather of Chief Crowfoot", no, it's – it's, you know, all the things that he was about, what my great grandfather was about, what my grandfather was about what my dad was about and me, you know, that's a lot of history back in then and so is my mom. – Elk Woman, 05 November 2016, Tsuut'ina

Family connections were a way for craft makers to establish their social position within their community and culture. Craft making becomes a continuance of the knowledge and culture that has been transmitted through the generations of one's family. It is a tangible, material representation of identity and experience. Identities are embedded in the designs and techniques

used to build the items that they wear. Identities and prestige are recognized in the quality of the work that one does or that with which they adorn themselves. Heritage and family are represented visually in the patterns that adorn the crafts and how patterns (in beadwork, style, etc.) act as markers that individualize the work to both the crafter and the recipient and carry on their stories.

Mr. Starlight explained it this way:

...that's my design, but I gave it to my son so now that's his design. If he wants to keep using it he can keep using it. The colours are his. Anyone can make the same design as him but they have to use different colours. So that's his colours for that design, that's his but it used to be mine and I start giving my children my beadwork. – B. Starlight, Tsuut'ina, 03 August 2016, Tsuut'ina

The designs he passed along are as unique as a fingerprint. They acted as a signature that identified him and his family line and his tribal identity. Passing on his design to his next of kin is a way of transmitting a story from one generation to the next, much like passing down a family heirloom. The techniques and knowledge that surround craft work connect participants to a river of history that flows through their communities. This ties them into a common tradition, and the knowledge that they hold is revered by other members of their community.

As the most elderly of the participants, Mr. Crane Bear shared stories that stretched far back in time and demonstrated how close we still are to the pre-Treaty era. For example, Tom learned directly from Elders who grew up prior to the forced engagement in Indian Residential Schools²⁸ who provided him with knowledge, cultural teachings, and history.

Mr. Crane Bear shares how his family ties gave him access to a broad range of traditional knowledge, where knowledge is likened to Western ideologies of capital:

I got some here [traditional medicine] because my grandfather's a Cree and I learned from him too, along with my Blackfoot grandfather on my mother's side,

²⁸ Discussed in Chapter Two

he was on my dad's side. So, I'm rich (laughs). – T. Crane Bear, Siksika, 13 October 2016, Banff

Here family ties facilitate access to knowledge. In this particular example, having family from two different tribes (Cree and Blackfoot) extended the range of the knowledge he learned and was able to pass down to the next generation. The participant considered himself rich because of his diverse heritage and the cultural teachings that his heritage provided to him.

4.2.3 *The Role and Responsibilities of the Craft Maker as Teacher*

Participants often spoke about how they were contributing to teaching their culture to youth on the reserves in more formalized settings such as classes and after-school programs. The programs are aimed at youth in the communities. These more structured settings used to teach about crafts and culture reflect the holism of the Indigenous perspective in appreciating what was being taught.

Classes where culture was passed along included many aspects that emerged outside of the physical production of cultural objects and included lessons about community, language, history, and spirituality. Participants describe how teaching and learning occurs in these class settings:

...we had a program here for drum making, for boys and then there were – we had 18 boys here. And then, umm... week before they made their drums and then this last Thursday, they started to learn how to sing, and it wasn't just singing, these elders came and talked to them about the respect of the drum, the hide...we teach them about the history, you know, about things like – we just don't hold beading classes, we talk to them about the history of it, that's how we pass them on. – Elk Woman, Siksika, 05 November 2016, Tsuut'ina

Teaching in this way is echoed by Anonymous who stated how language is used as the foundation to teach other skills:

W: Okay. And, how do you teach when you teach this kind of thing?

A: Well, first of all I teach them our language. You see, we lost our language quite a few years back, and now we're trying to bring that up, and I'm teaching my language, to pre-schoolers and to junior high and Stoney gospel songs, all about the respectful ways that the old people used back in their day, trying to

bring that to the modern times and it's working. – Anonymous, 27 November 2016

This illustrates that learning the steps of producing items is only a small part in the overall process of crafting and creating cultural objects. Here students learning about their culture as it is linked or woven into the history of their people using songs and language. They become part of the cultural tradition as they are taught to create it.

The traditional methods of transmitting knowledge that are used in these settings have the potential to result in misunderstanding for those unprepared to adapt to the Indigenous ways of hands-on teaching and learning. As First Nations scholar Leanne R. Simpson (2004) points out, “[f]rom the perspective of Indigenous Peoples, *how* you learn is as important or perhaps more important than *what* you learn...” (p. 380).

For those accustomed to regimented schedules and direct instruction, cultural learning in Indigenous settings may be confusing. In this part of the interview, Elk Woman spoke about her teaching style and she explained the difference between Indigenous education and western education with this story:

There was this one person that came from the university – you're not the only one that has come here to learn about our culture, hey – he came and then he said, “I'm studying culture”, you know, “I'm studying... uh... studies of Indigenous people and all that, and you know, I came to learn.” What he expected was paper, ok? You know, today you're gonna learn this, today you're gonna learn this, time and, you know, all that structure. But, little did he know that we don't teach that way. We teach by, you know, looking. We teach by listening, we teach by hands on, you know, all that hey... Elk Woman, Siksika, 05 November 2016, Tsuut'ina

Understanding the traditions draws more appreciation towards understanding the Indigenous perspective that concentrates on awareness of the world, of context and of cause and effect in all areas of life. Traditional knowledge is not properly understood without connecting it to the world that it comes from and this happens through the *hands-on*, immersive teaching style. The

participants used *relationality* to teach the skills that they were passing on. One cannot understand the contribution or the role of craft making without taking into consideration how it is connected to all other parts of the culture. This is best understood by looking at the knowledge about craft making in the form of stories.

Examining connection within the context of how craft making contributes to and maintains the cultural narrative shows how First Nations culture is irreducible to its constituent parts. The knowledge about crafts is tied together and inseparable from spirituality, history, language, and tradition. It is passed on to those who come to understand and respect the worldview of their people through personal investment in the culture. In the following excerpt, Elk Woman shares the meaning of this connection:

So, you know, those are the kinds of things that we know, and this is what we teach our young people, hey. So, identity is really – identity, language, customs, values are all in one. They are in one. And then, you know, to try and separate them, that's, you know, you don't get a clear picture of it. – Elk Woman, Siksika, 05 November 2016, Tsuut'ina

The data shared by the participants shows that some stories are lived out by participants and some stories have been passed down. The stories are told in the *language* of the people and they highlight the *values* of the community (nature, family, history). They help to construct an *identity* and the pass along traditional *customs*. This is how the knowledge is woven together with all other aspects of the culture, intertwined and linked in various ways so that understanding it, authentically, comes with an understanding of its connection to these other pieces.

This data shows the various forms that traditional knowledge takes. Knowledge is handed down from generation to generation by Elders to the young ensuring its survival. The knowledge is shaped into stories, that are shared from one person to another and some that are recorded in the designs that adorn the crafts. Still and others are lived out by those taking part in the learning and

teaching of traditional culture. This knowledge is transmitted through family ties and through what could be called apprenticeships. It is handed down both one-on-one and in larger class-like settings but the transmission of the knowledge occurs through hands-on learning where those who wish to access the information are immersed in the culture.

4.3 The Value of Knowledge

The power of knowledge is reflected in the ways that the participants learn and teach craft making. This makes the knowledge real, tangible, and situational. As Mr. Starlight states that teaching and learning is a hands-on experience:

...they kinda watch their people who are interested and then they start teaching them, “come and help me cut the willows”, “come and help me peel the willows”, “come and help me straighten out the willows”. And then they start – they tell stories, and then they start putting things together. – B. Starlight, Tsuut’ina, 03 August 2016, Tsuut’ina

Other participants noted that the knowledge surrounding certain crafts (especially head dresses) was handed down only to select individuals by those who held the *rights* to that knowledge. For example, when I asked Mrs. Deranger about the significance of the craft that she was making, she responded:

W: Can you tell me a little bit more about the significance of it? (She is working on a pipe bag)

L: Um, not without going into the significance of a pipe and I’m not a pipe holder

W: Ok

L: So, you would have to ask P. [her partner is seated in the same room watching television] about that because he’s a pipe holder. – L Deranger, Anishinaabe, 23 September 2016, Calgary

The rights to the knowledge that the participants held is an achievement earned through participation and community engagement. It is another example of the relationship between the craft makers and their traditional knowledge. The concept of *rights* to certain fields of knowledge

means that knowledge holders with those rights will preserve the knowledge from abuse or distortion. *Rights* refers to a community recognized permission to create important traditional crafts. For someone to build items that are considered sacred (such as head dresses or pipes) an elder who had previously earned the rights to make these items would be able to transfer that privilege to someone else based on their merit in the community.

For example, Mr. Starlight explains that a select few people in his community have earned the right and learned the correct way to build some of these crafts:

...there's only a few that do things properly so those kind of people they look for, they look for you, they say "Can you make me a hat? Can you do a backrest for me?" It's not just anyone, it's a few of us, now especially, there's just a few of us can actually do the work. – B. Starlight, Tsuut'ina, 03 August 2016, Tsuut'ina

The participant who shared the following story describes in more detail how one goes about getting the rights to produce head dresses:

Well I never... see, these are very sacred, to us. To some, curiosity leads them, you just have to wait. Most of these head dress makers they've been given the rights to go ahead. Not in a large classroom... you won't learn... if you want to learn something then it's up to you. It's how you feel about learning that skill, this is how you're going to approach the elder ... I'm still a head dress holder, and I got the rights to touch this [indicates head dress beside him], I have the rights to repair this. See, we don't just go "oh, I can do it" you know, no, no, no. We hold these in high... high, way up, you know you can't just... You go to an elder and he'll show you. He'll give you the rights. If he's a head dress – if he's in that society, he has the rights to pass that skill on to you. But, if you go to an elder who don't have the rights and all he wants is something from you, that doesn't work. – T. Crane Bear, Siksika, 13 October 2016, Banff

The relationship that these participants have towards the skills and knowledge that they hold is apparent here:

...he always used to tell me once in a while, "If you know how to make this and that, don't abuse it. It's not something you can abuse because, spiritually, I ask the spirits that I use this in a nice way not to abuse it..." – Anonymous, 27 November 2016

The value that traditional knowledge holds in the communities highlights the social standing of craft makers and was repeatedly expressed as a measure of how they value themselves. An individual like Mrs. Deranger demonstrates how these traditions and histories adapt and flow in the current of modernity explaining:

L: So, you know I think it's important to keep the old skill sets alive but we don't need to necessarily be doing pieces that look like they belong in a museum. You know, we can make things that are functional – I love functional art – you know, and we can make things that are functional and contemporary using traditional materials and skills. – L. Deranger, 23 September 2016, Calgary

Learning the traditional ways of producing material culture requires a personal investment on the part of the learner. The craft maker passes down their knowledge and presents the student with all the necessary information encouraging them to find their own way. It is a process of retaining the information that is being handed down and a process of socialization that draws the student into the fold. Socialization is an important principle in the transmission of knowledge as the *student* must develop a respect and appreciation for the traditions and customs so as not to misuse the knowledge.

How the knowledge is passed on, how it is transmitted, and the forms that it takes, makes clear that craft making is not concerned with generic instruction. Rather, craft making is a journey of self-discovery for those involved. One learns to see the world and connect to it in a different way and learn about their histories and where their community's traditions and beliefs come from. As people come to learn about crafts and craft making they are linked into a web of connections that combines the material objects to the social and physical worlds that surround them.

4.4 How Crafts are Made

There is a strong emphasis on the hands-on experience and on the materials when looking at how the crafts are made. The personal investment in the process extends beyond simply stitching pieces

together or putting the beads on the string. For example, designing the item combines the actual material layout of the item with dreams, visions, or signs experienced by the craft maker^[1]. Many of the materials used to make traditional Indigenous goods are also harder to acquire than by making a quick trip to a craft store. Craft makers need to be able to source different things like feathers, hides or porcupine quills, skills that all rely on yet another body of knowledge.

4.4.1 Finding the Right Parts

A number of tasks must take place before the crafting begins. For example, collecting the raw materials, knowing where to get the best materials, and negotiating the legislation that controls certain products that come from wild animals.²⁹ These steps are all necessary to the completion of a craft project.

Craft making itself is influenced by market pressures on things such as material and labour costs. The former applies to all craft makers as at least some part of what they make has to be purchased. Things like tools, or beads that can be purchased at a craft shop are subject to economic fluctuations that affect the creative process. Materials such as porcupine quills, eagle feathers, and animal hides can be even more difficult to procure unless someone is aided by their social network, knowledge, and/or skills.

Tom Crane Bear shared a story that stressed the necessity of traditional knowledge in the procurement of different types of stones:

What we do is we carve the pipe out of a stone – rock – and there’s certain stones you find here that are made for that – in that line, they call them the pipe stone, and you can find them in the mountains, not in the prairies. The prairie stones we use is for sweats. See, there’s difference – different rocks, different minerals for different ceremonies. – T. Crane Bear, Siksika, 13 October 2016, Banff

²⁹ There are government restrictions on the commerce of certain items used for making crafts, especially eagle feathers which are used to make head dresses and other important cultural items. This has resulted in craft makers having a tougher time finding the things that they need to build their crafts.

Another participant discussed the appropriate applications for the different types of animal hides that are used in craft making:

the animal hides... the real sturdy one is the moose because it's tough and it's thick, and the deer hide is more fragile, but that too we use that too in dances and ceremonies. The rattle and the moccasins and the regalia. We use that and elk too, its sturdy too, and we use that for – moose and elk – we use that to make drums. – Anonymous, 27 November 2016

Lee Deranger talked about the use of porcupine quills in her work. She discussed not only her fascination with the process but also how that translated into the price of an item:

I had a knack for porcupine quills, right, which the other ladies recognized when I was very young... and I was fascinated with quill work, I was fascinated with dying quills, with the... even with the plucking alright? Their little feet and you know. The porcupine quill stuff fascinated me, going and harvesting the bark, all of it... – L. Deranger, Anishinaabe, 22 September 2016, Calgary

She later added an anecdote regarding the price of an item that she had crafted using the quills:

...the time that you spend plucking the porcupine and dying the quills and washing them, that's just the actual construction... and then [a potential customer] asked "how much is it?" and I said "\$300" which wasn't even ten bucks an hour... – L. Deranger, Anishinaabe, 22 September 2016, Calgary

Bruce Starlight contributed his own story regarding the challenges he faced in sourcing certain materials:

A war bonnet is a chief regalia it's made out of feathers and right now we have to use artificial feathers we can't – we're not allowed to use the real eagle feathers. – B. Starlight, Tsuut'ina, 03 August 2016, Tsuut'ina

...we use wool, you know, heavy wool. It used to be duffel wool, but you can't get it anymore it's hard to find you can't get that good heavy wool. They used to use it on, you know, the North West Mounted Police, they used it on their jackets, that was a really resilient wool and we used to make it fancy and put that on the edge. – B. Starlight, Tsuut'ina, 03 August 2016, Tsuut'ina

The participants' use of natural materials adds a different dynamic to the craft making process. It demonstrates that the craft making process is connected to a number of outside forces that the craft maker must navigate to see a project through to the end. Skills must extend beyond

those that are used to actually put something together. The craft maker must also have the knowledge to identify and obtain the best material to do the job.

4.4.2 A Process

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4.5 Telling the Story

Framing the way that the knowledge about crafting is structured by the participants in the previous section allows one to explore the content of the stories that are embedded in the crafts. Aspects of life are highlighted in the perspectives of the participants who shared their stories. The substantive themes that appeared in the literature, and the descriptions shared by the participants in their personal narratives are explored. A rudimentary translation of the narratives that are embedded in crafts follows which highlights the themes of spirituality, nature, achievement, and social structures.

4.5.1 Spirituality

Spirituality was a common theme shared in participants' stories about crafts. Indigenous spirituality plays a significant role in how crafts are created. Design and process act as a channel to communicate with a higher power. In the productive stage of craft making, prayer is used to channel the Creator through the hands and minds of the craft maker. Craft makers say their prayers for guidance in creating their items. The finished product is symbolic of the relationship to Indigenous spirituality as it becomes a material expression of this connection to the Creator. The cosmologies of the Indigenous Plains Tribes³⁰ while distinct and nuanced in their own ways, is described by John W. Friesen (2008) as, "... the underlying essence of the universe is spiritual, which translates to an attitude of awe, appreciation, and respect for all living things" (p. 25). This is illustrated by Tom Crane Bear when he describes how he receives guidance from the Creator when he is making his crafts:

When you're making these you always remember you gotta use your hands, your fingers and let them be guided by someone greater than you, this is how some of

³⁰ As Lee Deranger is Anishinaabe this observation does not pertain to her culture.

them are so good at making head dresses, at making moccasins, bead working you got all kinds of designs. – T. Crane Bear, Siksika, 13 October 2016, Banff

A similar story was told by another participant:

We get blessed by the spirits. We smudge and the smoke carries the message up to the eagle... the uh, uh, grandfathers as I would call it. So, uh, from there you get blessed and you come up with the design that would you... that tells you that you are answered by the spirits. – Anonymous, 27 November 2016

4.5.2 Animism and The Eagle

The connection between spirituality and craft overlaps into the natural world. The theme of animism³¹ emerged in the interviews. There was a strong focus on the roles of animals in both the crafts being made (the use of feathers, hides, etc.) and the role of nature and animals that the crafts represented. For example, the eagle is of particular mention. Wendi Field Murray (2009) explains:

...eagle parts, such as bones and feathers, actively engaged with human beings and other objects in various contexts, and they also had transformative effects on individuals who handled them. The eagle's simultaneous participation in the spiritual and corporeal worlds, in addition to its associations with ancestors and gods ... confer upon the eagle and its body parts a particularly powerful and influential role... (P. 149)

Mr. Starlight illustrates this role as he shares his sense of responsibility to the animals that provide the materials from which crafts are made:

You honour the eagle, you, you're honouring the animal that you got the hide from and you honour the animal that you're gonna put it on to, you see? And you wanna make that animal look good, the best you can. –B. Starlight, Tsuut'ina, 03 August 2016, Tsuut'ina

This participant also shared with me that eagles are held in high regard:

The eagle, we hold that in high – very high esteem... A high place. –T. Crane Bear, Siksika, 13 October 2016, Banff

The sentiment was echoed by the following participant:

³¹ Animism is the attribution of a spiritual component to animals, plants, phenomena, and all other components, animate and inanimate, of the natural world.

What I try to get the emphasis is, for ceremonial purposes the replica of the eagle ... and if we pray to the eagle spirit, also, then they look after us. I have seen that too and it works. – Anonymous, 27 November 2016

The importance the eagle in these excerpts shows how animals are considered in the participants' perspectives in a way that represents a partnership and perhaps a more egalitarian way of conceptualizing society's role in the natural world. As noted by Vladimir Hulpach (1965), "[t]he Indian belief in the supernatural powers of animals was reflected in the fact that they considered animals to be their ancestors, and their own names were frequently derived from the animal world..." (p. 234). The stories that participants shared insist that humans are a part of a cooperative with the living world and that our relationships to animals need to be recognized as such.

This idea is emphasized by Bruce Starlight where he comments:

...this Garden of Eden – North America, South America – before the white man came, we were at the mercy of the animals because they outnumbered us, we were at the mercy of the plants because they outnumbered us, so we had to learn how to live in their environment and so, through the millennia, through the thousands and millions of years that we've been on Earth, we began to understand the animal, appreciate why they're here, you see? – B. Starlight, Tsuut'ina, 03 August 2016, Tsuut'ina

Participants also shared stories that included animal actors in roles that had less to do with craft making. These stories helped to further illustrate the roles that different animals play within the context of Indigenous culture and highlight different aspects of the relationships between humans and animals.

In this excerpt a ceremony to honour the changing of the seasons is described:

From our forefathers we have, uh, what we call the Saskatoon berries, the first fruits of the uh, Earth. In June/July we honour, we have a big ceremony in our powwow. Everybody gets a bowl of Saskatoon berries and before they eat they take one kernel out and they pray with it and after they pray a guy comes along with a bowl and you throw that in there. These berries that are put in there will go back to our brothers, the birds, so they can have a feast (laughs). – T. Crane Bear, Siksika, 13 October 2016, Banff

Further, the respect that the participant felt towards the wolverine was illustrated when he was commissioned to draw it on a tipi:

It's just – it took me four years to do a wolverine design because I was afraid of the animal. Until my nephew said, “I saw the wolverine up on the west side and it was like a little boy that had a cape on” and I said “okay, I’ll draw it. Four years they asked me and I kept saying... I didn’t say anything, and the fourth year they came again and then he told me that story and I was like “okay, I’ll do it”. – B. Starlight, Tsuut’ina, 03 August 2016, Tsuut’ina

Below, the participant shares the way that certain traditions and ceremonies are inspired by and honour aspects of nature:

Well, the chicken dance outfits I mentioned is for uh, um, there was a ceremony, ok? It was a dance that came from the prairies. They imitate the uh, prairie chicken, how they are. Uh, and then so, it was danced – first it was danced in uh, a Sundance. It was part of the ceremonies in a Sundance, and then in later years it got brought, you know, to the powwows and um, and then, they started to put outfits to that. – Elk Woman, Siksika, 05 November 2016, Tsuut’ina

Further, Lee Deranger was inspired in her work by aspects of nature as she shared this story:

...a lot of my inspiration comes from nature, right – umm, I’ve got a painting I’m going to do after the weekend that – when the full moon happened the other night, we were up visiting a friend in Varsity and I was out on the deck and looked up at the sky and the clouds were all lit up from the full moon, but, where there was no cloud, where it was just dark sky, the clouds had actually formed the shape of a turtle. It was a perfect frickin’ turtle in the opening in the clouds, okay? So, I’m gonna paint that you know, after things calm down a bit on Sunday. So, on Sunday I’m gonna paint that one. – L. Deranger, Anishinaabe, 23 September 2016, Calgary

Another participant relates to me the significance of the buffalo and the meaning that it holds in his culture:

Back in the old years the buffalos fed us. They helped us survive, meaning that we relied on the buffalo for food. Ever since the big slaughter that took care of the buffalo and after that the signing of the Treaty, buffalos were protected but yet, still’s looking after us, meaning buffalo spirit the skull, for ceremonial purposes, it’s answering us and looking after us... - Anonymous, 27 November 2016

These stories illustrate the different roles that various animals play within the participant's inspirations, perspectives, and understanding. However, in all these stories the animals share in a healthy respect from their human counterparts. Animals are seen as providers, as inspiration, and as teachers in these stories (Hulpach 1965). Their inclusion in traditional material culture represents their iconic status within these cultural groups as symbols of admirable qualities or desired physical abilities. The strong relationship between animals, the natural world, and human beings is a significant component of the narratives that are embedded within the craft maker and the crafts they create.

4.5.3 Social Structures and Hierarchy

Social structure is another feature of the stories that are embedded in craft work. These are understood as the normative social structures (the customs, norms, and social rules) that guide Indigenous societies. This is illustrated, in part, in the way that various crafts are used to distinguish roles within the community and can also represent the wearer's (or holder's) social standing. The wearer's role can be distinguished both in the crafts themselves and the maker's prowess and reputation as the most skilled crafters are naturally the most sought after. Referring to the former, the following quotes demonstrate how crafts designate their owner's social standing.

Tom Crane Bear explains to me the different societies that exist in Indigenous communities, distinguished by material articles:

We have head dresses for holy societies, pipe holders. Once you get the head dress, these head dresses are initiated to you by an elder then you become a head dress holder. You become... you become... you come into the society of head dress owners. – T. Crane Bear, Siksika, 13 October 2016, Banff

Of greatest significance in the recognition of status and achievement in the participants' communities is the headdress. Lee Deranger stresses the significance of the head dress and the growing political tension that surrounds their being given out to government officials:

...there are certain things that are becoming politicized, ok, like, in another era it was not a political act to give a politician a head dress it was just like, you know, the greeting card when they got into office, okay? Now there's a movement afoot to not give them a head dress unless they've earned it. – L. Deranger, Anishinaabe, 23 September 2016, Calgary

Mrs. Deranger's sentiments have been well documented in the news (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/behind-first-nations-headdresses-1.3506224>) as debates surrounding the wearing of headdresses grow. Both current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (from the Tsuut'ina) and former Prime Minister Stephen Harper (from the Kainai) received headdresses from Treaty 7 tribes upon being elected. The decisions of the tribes to bestow such an honour upon these politicians came under considerable scrutiny in regard to whether either of the recipients had earned such an honour or whether it was simply a political gesture.

There are conflicting views in mainstream society regarding the political representation of Indigenous culture. However, as explained in the quote below, bestowing traditional gifts on high-ranking political members in Western society is seen as an act of acknowledgement of the specific persons' place within their own society, and not necessarily a representation of place in an Indigenous culture:

...the men... had their buckskin outfits and that represented the... hierarchy... we always had that and we lived by that, hey. Uh... the Sundance and the... and the chief and council, hey, those are the people that had those buckskin outfits and they were beaded, you know, feather hats, you know, that was the representation of the, uh... hierarchy level that we lived on, hey. – Elk Woman, Siksika, 05 November 2016, Tsuut'ina

Different crafts are used to recognize the achievements and social ranking of the people who earned them and also to distinguish high ranking individuals in government and in ceremony. The opportunity to learn the skills necessary to create some of these crafts and the rights to produce certain articles, must have to be earned. The rights to produce certain crafts are protected by members of the community and extended only to those who have earned them through recognition

by elders in the community. Certain ceremonial items are considered sacred and are indicators of achievement within the community. Therefore, the rules surrounding who receives a head dress must be strictly followed. The same rules apply to those who produce the items. Craft makers are cognizant of the spiritual power of the items they create and were respectful of the rules that pertained to the ritual that surrounded them.

4.5.4 Customs

Participants did not just share stories that referred to direct associations between craft work and social structure. Information was also shared regarding the social rules and customs of traditional roles and rules in Indigenous communities that craft workers must observe. Participants share some of these customs in the following excerpts.

Elk Woman explains some rules about how a person is meant to conduct themselves among family and in-laws in terms of communication:

I wouldn't go to my brother-in-law and talk directly to him, hey. I'd go through his wife and, you know, then tell him, you know, "we're looking for this" or "can we do this", you know, whatever, then the wife tells... that's how it is. – Elk Woman, Siksika, 05 November 2016, Tsuut'ina

These customs, as discussed by Mr. Starlight, are part of a system of norms that are alien to outsiders:

If you're an outsider, you know, because you have a different value system, it's really valueless. But if you have those innate value systems bred into you, taught into you, if you have it in you, you can admire... - B. Starlight, Tsuut'ina, 03 August 2016, Tsuut'ina

Tom Crane Bear shared a more spiritual perspective on why certain social norms exist:

And also, in the plains we don't sweat with the women. They have their own. We have our own. We can't mix because of blood. We just talked about blood a little while ago. It's bad uh... the woman discharges the blood. It's uh... it's uh... sacred because it comes from the Creator. – T. Crane Bear, Siksika, 13 October 2016, Banff

The material culture produced by the participants is a reflection of the way they live in their communities. Investigating these items as objects separate from the worlds in which they exist is fruitless. One begins to see the *being* in these items with the way that they are interacted with and vice versa. Because, for many Indigenous groups, there is no clear line between animate and inanimate, the spirit of the Creator flows through everything in the world giving everything a role in one's daily life.

It is important to understand craft makers as unique individuals situated within a network of kinship ties and responsibilities. Craft making is not something that is approached without a connection to the surrounding community that includes history and family and the appreciation of traditional ways. As such, craft makers are storytellers. They use stories to convey the lessons involved in producing the crafts that they make and through the objects and designs that they create.

4.6 Raising the Flag

This final section illustrates how the participants' stories contributed to a narrative of *Resistance*. Resistance refers to ways that Indigenous culture perseveres and survives in the face of persistent efforts to marginalize and erase it (Hill 2009). Indigenous resistance in this project relates back to Vizenor's (2008) concept of survivance, one that describes the active, ongoing presence of Indigenous identity and being in contemporary society. Whether this occurred through an active, politicized effort to call out and disrupt colonial discourse and policy (the artwork of Lee Deranger) or as a latent effect of preserving culture through the traditional production of cultural articles (the designs and patterns and their endurance through time), every participant spoke about using craft to counter the effects of colonization in their communities.

4.6.1 Preserving Old Ways

The skillsets and knowledge associated with craft work become material links to the culture and its history. These need to be kept alive so that the culture can continue to survive. In the stories below, participants share their desire to preserve their skills and knowledge so that future generations can benefit from them.

Elk Woman describes how she seeks to preserve the culture was a way to *save* younger generations who had lost their way in mainstream society:

W: ...earlier you were talking about ... some of the younger generations being lost to the mainstream and stuff. Have you found that teaching these skills about crafting and making traditional things, has that helped people, kinda, regain an identity?

EW: Oh ya, they... you can – it is amazing for these young people to, you know, to learn hey. Once they know their identity, that's the biggest, uhh... thing I've seen in my years of work is – when I say they're lost, not only are they lost in customs but they are lost in their identity, hey, and, umm... once they know who they are and where they came from, their attitudes change and there's a sense of belonging right there. – Elk Woman, Siksika, 05 November 2016, Tsuut'ina

Further, Lee Deranger continues to use traditional skills in her art work:

So, you know I think it's important to keep the old skillsets alive but we don't need to necessarily be doing pieces that look like they belong in a museum. You know, we can make things that are functional – I love functional art – you know, and we can make things that are functional and contemporary using traditional materials and skills. – L. Deranger, Anishinaabe, 23 September 2016, Calgary

This sentiment was echoed by a participant who shares his inspiration to continue crafting:

W: What inspires your designs and that when you make your products?

B: To keep the traditional artwork alive. To keep the traditional handwork that we... that was done before. To keep it going to make sure that it survives the... uh, time. And that is the greatest inspiration I have. – B. Starlight, Tsuut'ina, 03 August 2016, Tsuut'ina

4.6.2 *Protecting Traditions*

The desire to keep the ‘old’ skills and knowledge alive fosters an opposition to intrusions made by modern elements of society. These contemporary forces are seen by participants as destructive to, or exploitative of, the traditional ‘spirit’ of Indigenous culture. This includes the appropriation of various Indigenous designs and the use of non-traditional materials. Participants discuss how elements of mainstream society have corrupted the culture and thereby earned a strong feeling of resentment from the traditionalist crowd for the cultural appropriation and exploitation of traditional designs:

...because it's individualized we don't mass produce 'a' design. It's made for that single purpose. But since the uh... you know, a lot of our designs that... the southwest design on western shirts, we never gave that to them, they just took it. You know, they didn't even ask us "Can we use those designs on the cowboy shirts" they didn't ask us they just mass produced it. A lot of us craft workers were just pissed off. You know, they had no right to do that, they appropriated our culture. What's worse is there's off-shore garbage coming from India and Pakistan and China. That's our designs, they just appropriate our stuff. And silverwork, they're doing that now, they're bringing stuff in from Asia that's duplicating our designs and, we're helpless, Canadian government won't do anything. Over there they won't do anything because for something I would pay here like a thousand dollars to be made, like a belt or a... the strips on a buckskin outfit like his, you can get it over there for five dollars. – B. Starlight, Tsuut'ina, 03 August 2016, Tsuut'ina

The use of synthetic materials was viewed as problematic by this participant who addresses their use in powwow regalia:

...the roaches that they wear, used to be made from porcupine quills, but now, the replica is upcoming and it's destroying the powwow spirit because the roaches that they use nowadays is synthetic crap made from non-native people, so... it comes from the factory. – Anonymous, 27 November 2016

Tom Crane Bear highlights how authentic work is appreciated in craft making:

I buy crafts from other Native people. I don't go to this town, I never spend anything on this... some of them are the – just cheap junk, you know, but the uh... I like the work that the Stoneys are doing and it comes from here [pats his

chest] and they put their whole effort to make a good, good project. Acceptable amongst the people. Moccasins, head dresses, jackets, and all these are handmade. Made by a human. The other ones, quick money, are made by machines, you know, cheap- cheap jewellery.... – T. Crane Bear, Siksika, 13 October 2016, Banff

Finally, the draw of mainstream culture was something that this participant viewed as a threat to the wellbeing of young people in her community encouraging her in her role as a mentor:

Today's society, which is the teenagers and all, it's been lost, you know, they've gone to that side of the road, you know, to the non-cultural side of the road, they've gone that way, and to us traditionalists, you know, we look at them and then we say "they're lost", you know, because of the influence – because of the different culture, the influence of this and that, you know, uh... they're lost, and once a person is lost the spirit is lost, you know, according to our culture, that's how we preserve it, ya. – Elk Woman, Siksika, 05 November 2016, Tsuut'ina

Participants are affected by the pressures brought on by contemporary society such as the appropriation of their cultures and shifting dynamics in their relationships to the social world outside of their communities. However, they also indicate the resilience of the traditional culture as it continues to survive alongside a commercial, market driven society.

4.6.3 Activism and Opposition

The critique of modern social issues is taken to another level in terms of political resistance where art provided a voice for one participant that helped her to combine the traditional knowledge passed down to her with the reality of the modern Indigenous experience; Indigenous craft is modified from a strictly traditional role to serve as an active voice. The crafter has assumed an evocative medium through which to channel the joys and frustrations of the people and culture that she represents. As opposed to the traditional mediums that the other participants were engaged in, the participant above further extended her traditional skills and knowledge to highlight Indigenous issues in a format that is more readily accessible to the mainstream society and thus, more capable of delivering her message to a non-Indigenous audience. Still, where participants keep their *spoken*

opposition separate from their craft work, their work itself can be viewed as political. They continue to vocalize their resistance through other outlets.

Here, Lee Deranger tells how she uses her art to raise awareness and bring an Indigenous voice to political issues:

L: Oh – umm, my political pieces – my hope at least – is that they might foster change, or at least to shine the light in the dark and ugly corners so that maybe somebody can clean up the mess, you know? So, the political pieces – and, I mean, some of the political pieces were just – I have a really bizarre and off the wall sense of humour – so some of the political pieces are just my weird sense of humour. Like, I took the Harper apology and printed it on toilet paper and called it ‘Apology My Ass’... - L. Deranger, Anishinaabe, 23 September 2016, Calgary

Bruce Starlight travels to give talks about his culture and run ceremonies. In these he finds a platform to express his worldview to a broader audience. For example, he stated:

...when I run ceremonies I tell them, “Don’t depend on this, you had it, you had it in your cultures, it’s just that when the church came they started telling you how to live, where before the church came you knew how to live. You depended on that knowledge, now you’re dependent on somebody else, to tell you how it is to live, and that dependency has made you not appreciate where you came from.” That’s what I tell them. – B. Starlight, Tsuut’ina, 03 August 2016, Tsuut’ina

From the perspective of Tom Crane Bear, money had a destructive effect on the traditional ways that transactions between people took place:

And, you don’t just go ahead and sell this you gotta be initiated into these head dresses, into these pipes... So, now everything is focused on transfer to get money, see? And, so – it’s not like – in the olden days, horses were valuable... Money is ruin everything. Money, money, money, money. You even kill to get that money... – T. Crane Bear, Siksika, 13 October 2016, Banff

What Mr. Crane Bear saw in money was its capacity to replace interpersonal relationships. It is through these relationships that the material items transferred were endowed with their inherent value. For example, a headdress is significant because it represents achievement on the part of the

one who receives it. Likewise, being selected to build one is a recognition of one's skill, knowledge and commitment. In both cases it is inappropriate to reduce that recognition to a dollar amount.

The participants shared stories demonstrating a healthy awareness of, and resistance to, the ill effects brought about by mainstream culture and the colonial legacy that it carries with it. Participants were aware that their cultures faced considerable pressure from the outside but were hopeful and optimistic that it was resilient enough to survive this pressure.

Voices of resistance (manifested in the continuation of traditional cultures) are loud enough to highlight the destructive path of a mainstream culture. These voices can be recognized in the way that knowledge in Indigenous communities is shaped, transmitted, and reflected upon. They can be heard in the content of the stories that are recorded and contained in the crafts that are created. Indigenous craft making has a role to play in the continuance of the Indigenous narrative. The continuation of craft making is vital to the endurance and survival of the culture that it comes from. Spirituality was viewed as resistance. Storytelling was also resistance. In its authentic form, the knowledge and information transmitted by knowledge holders in Indigenous communities was resistant to mainstream appropriation.

5.0 Discussion

The narratives surrounding crafts, helps one to better understand the role of craft making in First Nations communities. This research also answers questions about how crafts and craft making are talked about, and how it is woven into the fabric of First Nations society. The data that I collected was told to me as stories that highlight the specifics regarding how the artisans talk about their craft making and how the knowledge about the crafts is shared or passed down to new craft makers. The stories tell of the experiences of the craft makers, their histories, and the history of the culture and the community in which these crafts are produced.

The stories can be organized into four avenues that critically examine the broader function of craft making in society: (1) the way stories are created and used to talk about craft making and pass along knowledge; (2) how these stories are embedded in the crafts that are created; (3) the way that a craft maker and their crafts are used to strengthen and maintain ties within the community; and (4) the interaction between craft making and Marx's Concept of Alienation.

Crafts are the combination of the many different worlds in which the craft maker exists in. They combine spirituality with nature, dreams with society,³² and history with contemporary existence. These crafting traditions depend not only on the handing down of stories from one generation to the next, but also on the socialization of future generations into the customs, norms, and belief systems of their communities. In other words, there is a special reliance on reviving and maintaining Indigenous perspectives and traditional knowledge in the wake of Canadian settler-colonialism.

³² Dreams and visions are recognized in many Indigenous cosmologies as extensions of a physical reality. They offer signs or guidance to those who experience them.

5.1 Stories

The *Story* is an important source of data because, as Lynne Davis (2004:3) writes, “Stories cement together generations of collective memory, embodying the historical, spiritual, social and spatial.” Stories appear to us as both personal accounts and as broader narratives within cultures. Above all, stories are human record and they serve to interpret, inform, and guide. For example, a story about a restaurant told to us by a friend may sway our decision to eat there. On a larger scale, stories shape our perceptions towards different groups of people can influence policy-making decisions and affect political opinion. Those with the authority to tell stories are often in important and socially-valued positions.

At first, I questioned whether the participants really understood what I was asking them until I realized that it was me who was misunderstanding *how* the information was being passed along to me. This chapter itself interprets a practice of knowledge transmission that disrupts the epistemic and ontological assumptions that provide the basis for much of western scientific research.

It is important to recognize the subjectivity of the story as a characteristic that enhances its value as data. Stories are valuable *for* their perspective rather than in spite of it. Using an anti-colonial methodology in this research, thus sharing and shaping the experience with all participants, helped me to better understand the circumstances and perspectives of the story teller. The way that the speakers use the language, a particular patois, perhaps, is often an indicator of background, social class, and the dynamics that are associated with it.

Within Indigenous communities, Elders are treated as, “...libraries of knowledge” (Calliou 2004:96) for the wealth of knowledge and experience that they hold. Elders continue to be relied on as sources of guidance and teaching in their communities, as their stories imbue their cultural

ethos; like the storybasket (Archibald 2008) described earlier, the narratives weaved by Elders contain many more layers of identity, belief, value and context as they are the oldest. The value of oral histories provided by Indigenous Elders is also being recognized outside of their own communities in academic and judiciary contexts. Brian Calliou (2004) warns that as these Elders age and pass away, there is an urgent need to record the knowledge that they hold so that future generations may benefit from it.

Given the importance that Indigenous communities place on knowledge and stories held by Elders and way that our own lives are shaped by and ordered into stories, it is important to recognize how stories are embedded in the material world around us. We live our stories in the world that we physically interact with on a daily basis. Our stories are set in physical places giving certain locations meaning or significance in our lives. The site of a momentous event becomes more than the sum of its physical parts to those who were affected by the event. We are surrounded by stories in our daily routines that are woven into the narratives of our lives. We are connected, willingly or not, to the narratives of thousands of other people.

The value of stories in our lives cannot be understated. Our concept of ourselves and our world is constructed from story. Many Indigenous cultures do not have a formalized system of writing. In this case, oral histories are even more valuable. Stories were entrusted to knowledge-holders who were bound to a code of accuracy and honesty. In the next section, I examine the role of craft makers who (as knowledge holders themselves) act as both authors and libraries. The crafts that they create are living records like journals and provide a continuing dialogue within communities.

In thinking about the value of traditional knowledge and stories in Indigenous communities, traditional craft goods may also function as time capsules. For example, a head dress,

drum, or pipe bag may preserve and store knowledge from one particular point in time so that it survives periods of cultural disruption or trauma. This perspective could be beneficial for First Nations communities struggling with the residue of cultural genocide that took place in residential schools. To better understand this, the next section will elaborate on the role of the craft maker in their community and the role played by craft goods.

5.2 Signs of the Times

The chattels we use carry our stories, they stand for something. Manufactured items such as combs or clothing bear meaning to us related to the way we use them. They become icons of the events that brought them to us and the histories that they represent to us. Inscribing our stories in the material world in the form of craft requires an appropriate investment whether it be a formal or informal ritual depending on the object in question. The participants are more than capable of discerning authenticity and identifying characteristics of a given piece of their material culture that indicate the owner's story.

I used a PowerPoint presentation in the recruitment stage of my research to demonstrate the objectives of this study to potential participants that contained a photo of a set of beaded moccasins. Almost all of the participants were able to identify the tribe that they came from by the patterns in the bead work. The craft makers also recognized in their stories in the counterfeit items produced overseas. They referred to these with disdain as if those products degraded the content and stories of the authentic ones. Much the same as someone's spoken language reveals a significant portion of their identity are hidden dialects observable in the material culture that they surround themselves with. Crafted goods, therefore, permit a more authentic version of a personal narrative on the part of both the maker and the end-user.

Making a craft that is authentic requires the maker to know the *language* of the craft. This is something that the participants learned from a young age. Their learning was done *in situ*. It required investment and experience that, in turn, produced more stories. The *language* of craft combines meaning with material and technique. It also includes histories and spirituality. Like any language, the language of a craft culture is deeply intertwined with a perspective that is shaped by that culture. They evolve and change together. It can only be understood on a meaningful level when a person is immersed in that culture and subject to the same social conditions. They are *connected*. As such, understanding the stories recorded in crafts, in their production and exchange, in their symbolism and ritual requires both effort and deed.

The craft makers are storytellers who meld together the physical and non-physical worlds. They are translators and mediums between our material world and that which escapes the purview of many non-Indigenous persons. If one looks at crafts as carriers of stories or narratives then one should also look at the craft maker as the author or storyteller. One comes to realize that the experiences of the craft makers appear in the items they make. These experiences reflect the relationships that these craft makers have with their surroundings, communities, families and the world around them.

Dreams can become beadwork designs, paintings and symbols on tipis and an array of items produced by craft makers. They are combined with personal histories, deeds, and accomplishments and are transferred from one person to the next throughout the lives of both the craft maker and the person who receives the craft.

5.3 A Craft Maker's Role

To better understand the role of the craft maker in First Nations society one must understand the key elements that define *craft* and where it fits within material culture. Material culture is a tangible

expression of how we view, understand, and/or interact with the world around us. As Dant (1999) illustrates, “[the]...*material* is that which we can see, touch and smell but which is not human or animal ... culture is the set of common human practices that surround material objects...” (p. 11).

Creating objects turns an abstract belief or idea into something tangible. It is not just that it turns *thought* into action but also, that once produced the object further shapes the behaviour of those who use it. The headdresses discussed by the participants designate the holder’s standing in their community and recognizes their achievements, but the materials used to construct the head dress, as well as the techniques and the processes involved in its making, are all products of Indigenous beliefs about their connection to nature and their relationship with the metaphysical.

Eagle feathers (one of many meaningful components of the headdresses) endow the headdress’s wearer with the symbolic power and respect that Indigenous cultures bestow on the eagle. The spiritual meditations undertaken by the craft maker throughout the process of creating the head dress ensure this connection between the maker’s creation and the intangible culture from which the headdress’s significance is derived.

Therefore, material culture is composed of two seemingly contradictory dynamics. On one hand, it is significant thanks to their physicality and their material presence in the world. Second, it is their utilitarian function. On the other hand, material culture owes much of its value to its unseen components like the intangible meanings embedded in its construction or the significance of a colour, or a pattern.

While viewing the picture of the moccasins, I was told that the colour red that was used in the bead work serves to protect the wearer from *bad medicine* that might otherwise bring them harm. There exist codes of practice and particular behaviours associated with material culture owed to stories or histories.

Crafts are situated within the realm of any society's material culture with more nuance. A concise definition of a craft is that it is something that is designed and produced by a single person. Therefore, while both a bicycle and a traditional drum (the kind used at a powwow) are examples of material culture, a bicycle cannot be considered a craft as it is (generally) produced industrially rather than by a single person. The individual craft person is the medium through which the intangible canon of beliefs, ideas, and histories materializes into the physical world. The characteristic that makes this especially important is that this is all filtered through an individual perspective, shaped by unique life experiences.

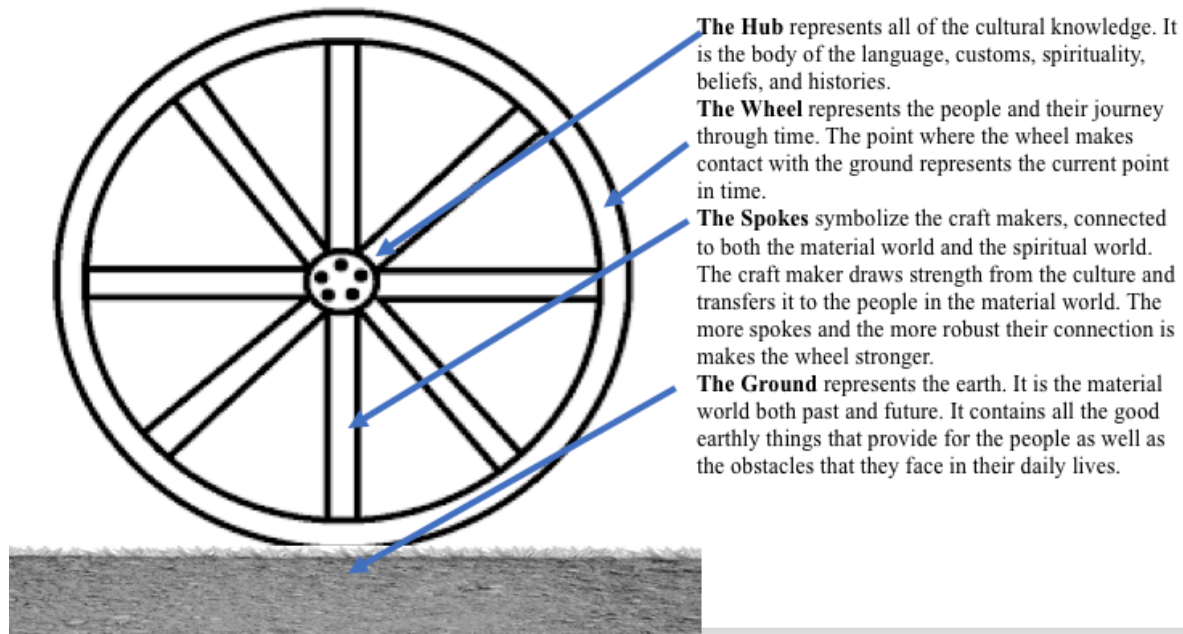
The craft maker³³ holds a privileged position in society where it concerns the creation of items that are regarded in high standing in a given culture. It is their perspective of the intersection between the physical (material culture) and metaphysical (spiritual) worlds that is recognized or endorsed by those around them. The way they interact with the world to create the crafts that they are known for may serve to lead, teach, or inspire their people to preserve the important traditional knowledge that they hold. It is not just tradition that guides the craft maker but rather the way they see their tradition interact when confronted with a dynamic, physical reality.

In using an object that someone has made, the user (usually) does so according to the culture from which the craft comes and thereby reproduces norms and beliefs associated with that culture. This way of thinking is the result of a much more complex combination of life experience, socialization, and immediate circumstance. There is a somewhat cyclical process to this cultural progression. Perhaps best illustrated by using a wheel rather than a static circle. The hub of the wheel represents the entirety of the culture with all of its beliefs, stories, knowledge, language, and practices. The rim of the wheel represents the people of that culture. The point where the wheel

³³ The craft maker here refers to those equipped with a traditional skillset that belongs to a specific cultural history, rather than the casual do-it-yourselfer.

touches the ground is best imagined as a particular point in the history of the culture and the people (the ground representing the physical world in space/time). The craft makers and knowledge holders then make up the spokes of the wheel thus connecting the people to their culture. This transfers that which makes up the culture to the people in the context of their present reality and supports the connection between the physical and the metaphysical worlds. Each of these spokes, both those past and those to come, contribute to the strength of the wheel. Where the wheel is operating with a limited number of spokes (or in a turbulent reality) the strength of the wheel is tested. The stronger the wheel the more likely it is to survive adversity.

Figure 1: The Craft Maker and Connection Model



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This example works to illustrate the role and position of an Indigenous knowledge holder (in this instance, craft maker), as it was explained to me during the interview process. Where the culture has been subject to erasure and destruction (as was Indigenous cultures in Canada) craft

³⁴ The wheel used in this illustration should be understood as a generic wheel. Its use is not meant to resemble the wheel of a Red River cart such as those emblematic of the Metis peoples of Canada.

makers remain as translators and decoders to unlock the cyphers that have survived in the material culture of their predecessors. But, crafts not only contain histories, they represent living journals of human activity and experience.

Yuko Kikuchi (2015) lists several fundamental characteristics of crafts as they are generally agreed upon by those who research it. This bears significant relevance for this discussion, they are *materiality and function*. For example, *material* as a characteristic denotes the physicality of the object. Its concrete presence in the world provides a physical form to interact with. While the term craft can be used in an abstract sense to define a particular skill or vocation, materiality sharpens the focus to the things that are produced that have a physical being. This physical existence of an object is used as the nexus from which comes more nuanced interpretations that focus on skill sets or expertise. Material presence is important in the scope of this study as we rely on the object as the vessel to transmit stories and knowledge. The material is visible and *readable*. It represents the content of the story. As M. Anna Fariello observes, “[t]he best works capture the motivations of an individual life and, extending specific circumstances and situations, translate these into a more universal language to reveal a collective human story” (2004:149). The skill and technique used to produce the craft represent that craft maker’s ability to tell the story. The more capable storyteller being a superior craftsman in both content and technique.

Function is the next characteristic of crafts listed by Kikuchi (2015). The craft is an object that is utile and beyond its aesthetic appearance. Throughout the analysis, I identified as a key feature, the important function of crafts in supporting the social structures and political hierarchies present in Indigenous communities. Part of this function, as Kikuchi (2015) identifies, is the object’s connection to the past, past ways of being, knowing, and behaving in a traditional society.

A particular item's function or utility is important in elaborating a craft's role as a *living journal*. An item that is created for the express purpose that it will be used, but it is only a story half-written. The craft maker writes the introduction, while the user finishes the tale. One of the participants in this research made knives and other traditional tools. Crafts in these categories have the most accessible stories as they are common-use type items.³⁵

It is the thematic content of craft goods that maintains and supports independent cultures in Indigenous communities. This happens in the way that a craft narrates a certain perspective of the world and how a person should interact with their surroundings. At first glance, a traditional craft, such as a head dress or a pair of moccasins is recognized as a symbol of a cultural identity. This is where craft making as a practice supports cultural identity for those involved.

Craft production becomes self-affirming for its makers because it relies on person-to-person contact thus forcing the craft maker to confront who he or she is through the interactions that are necessary for its production. That identity is reinforced where the craft maker is able to create a material representation that combines their history, family, community, beliefs, and surroundings. When a person is able to make something, with their own hands, relying on their own ingenuity and skills, it is easy to imagine that it is a positive, enriching experience for that person. When a person is able to create something that is recognized as culturally significant, as the craft makers in this research were able to do, it adds an extra element of personal satisfaction and self-affirmation.

³⁵ I have made, or have had made for me, a number of awls made from the tips of antlers or nails, for use in leather work. It is easy to recognize my favourite, easy to see (for anyone with a scant bit of insight in to leatherwork) which of them just happened to work for me when no other was available, and which of them is simply a failed experiment. The more functional the craft, the more it may have to say as it wears its use more visibly than something that is used as a decoration.

Ultimately, the craft maker becomes responsible for the production and legitimation of knowledge. They preserve the old knowledge that was passed down to them through the techniques and skills that they were shown to create things. These techniques and skills are based on a certain perspective of the world, a certain relationship to reality and existence. Through this perspective they interact with their world in real tangible ways, participating in the traditions and ceremonies of their communities, hunting, dancing, singing. Through these experiences they generate new knowledge and ideas that reflect the changing world around them that are then manifested in moccasins, head dresses, bags and horse tack.

Yet another perspective worth pursuing within the realm of craft making is its role in developing and/or preserving practical knowledge, skills, and abilities. Creating and building things requires a person to employ a variety of fundamental skillsets, skillsets that are otherwise alienated from the human actor in the post-industrial world (Marx 1983). To demonstrate this, I will use moccasins as an example. Many craft stores offer a kit to make moccasins, and they are an example of footwear omnipresent in many cultures.³⁶ To make these, one is required to take measurements, to cut materials, as well as lacing or stitching the pieces together. As a one off, it does not go much further than that, but for someone who continues to build things in that manner the basic skillsets used to begin with branch out and are further refined. Measurement comes to include enhanced planning, selection and conservation of materials. Cutting or shaping requires the maintenance of tools – keeping one’s blades sharp. Lacing or stitching requires focus and measured anticipation to achieve a desired result. Crafting activates both sides of the brain, enhancing creativity as well as honing logistical thinking.

³⁶ Mexicans have *huaraches*, the Argentines have *alpargatas* etc. Similarly, one might include *jandals* or *thongs*. Simple and available footwear that require few resources.

The Indigenous production of craft and the creation of material culture includes all of the stories and knowledge that go with it. It is not restricted to static interpretations of the world. Craft cultures are actively engaged in the goings-on of the world. They interact with and react to mainstream culture, and they are representative of a decolonial perspective in that they continually challenge current privileged knowledge and perspectives. They (the craft cultures) represent a different way of living in the world and a different way of interacting with the next. In this way, craft making traditions aid in the creation of decolonized spaces for the transfer and generation of knowledge according to First Nations epistemologies.

5.4 Unification – Alienation – Reunification

The participants viewed craft making is an important way to connect (and reconnect) people to their identity or culture. In this way, their stories illustrated ways in which craft work confronts the concept of alienation. The skillsets and knowledge associated with craft work become material links to the culture and its history that need to be kept alive so that the culture itself can continue to survive. In each of the interviews participants shared stories that reflected the unique way that craft work interacts with the four different aspects of alienation: (1) Alienation of Labour; (2) Alienation from the Product; (4) Alienation of *Species-Being* and; (3) Alienation of Man from Man.

5.4.1 *Craft Work vs Labour*

The Alienation of Labour occurs when a person is no longer in control of their own personal productive input. It is the driving force behind all other types of alienation. Marx ([1844]1983) writes, "[t]he product of labour is labour embodied and made material in a thing; it is the *objectification* of labour" (p. 133). This means that labour itself becomes a product. One is familiar with this concept as it is expressed as an hourly wage. If a task typically takes three hours to

complete and the worker is able to complete the task in two hours, then the worker will lose an hour of paid labour.

The definitive nature of craft work is resistant to this aspect of Alienation. A craft maker's labour is ultimately under his or her own control. Rather than basing the value of an item on the expenditure of labor, items are valued for the craft maker's expenditure of *skill*. Craft goods are admired and sought after for the way that they reflect a craft maker's abilities, their eye for detail, and their creativity. Items are recognized for the quality of the finished product in a way that promotes and reinforces a craft maker's reputation. A craft maker's labour is controlled by the craft maker rather than labour controlling the worker. The control of their creative labour was a means by which the craft makers established themselves in their community. Therefore, rather than objectifying and losing their labour it becomes a resource that reinforces them. The performance of craft work suits the craft maker's own ends illustrating their ability to create and reinforce their identity.

While this describes the majority of the crafts that were discussed in the research it is not an absolute quality of those who are involved in craft work. Mrs. Deranger was in a unique position. Her work oscillated along the spectrum between what could be described as *alienated* and that which she practiced as an expression of her agency. The former distinction is best demonstrated by her production of items that she assembled en masse without a significant amount of mindful investment. The labour that she invested in that regard had become a factor that controlled how she was invested in the product that she was making. This owed to how she used craft work as a commercial enterprise.

The concept of alienated labour demonstrates how as a craft maker, the investment of one's skill and efforts are based on their personal relationship with the craft making process. The

investment varies based on the product type. Creating goods for a strictly commercial purpose makes one vulnerable to the Alienation of labor. Conversely, the production of goods that served the craft maker's community or family were less likely to result in the estrangement of one's productive capacities.

5.4.2 *Commodification vs. Culture*

While many of the participants in this study were critical of the idea of using traditional knowledge and skills to create products for money, at least one participant made their living from craft making. Upon entering into a conversation of value one is invariably led to discuss the commodification of products and how this might be applied to craft goods.

When a cultural object becomes a salable good the craft maker immediately encounters the prospect of having their product alienated from them. The alienated product like alienated labour confronts the maker as something that is beyond their control. This notion buttresses the craft makers' objection to mass-produced products and imports. An object made on an assembly line, or that produced by a machine is a "junk" craft, it comes without *presence*, or *story*.

The alienated object is rendered null and void in the eyes of the initiated craft consumer. At the same time these objects saturate markets and result in the devaluing of goods that are produced authentically. Marx ([1844] 1983) writes, "[t]he *extinction of value* from the world of things is directly proportional to the *devaluation* of the world of men" (p. 133). The craft makers recognized that the value of a culturally significant craft good supersedes the application of monetary value. That is why the craft makers spoke about *rights* to produce certain culturally significant items.

Alienated labour produces an alienated object in that the maker controls neither their investment in the object nor the life of the object itself. However, craft makers expressed a number

of ways in which the products that they made became an extension of themselves. Their craft products carried their voice and their identity to wherever the object ended up. Therefore, the products they made gave back to them in terms beyond those of monetary compensation. Namely, the practice of craft helped craft makers actualize themselves in the goods that they created.

The stories that are contained in the objects along with their human elements make a connection between those involved in the making of them and those who receive them. These connections help to maintain relationships between people by opening up channels for interaction and the transmission of experience.

5.4.3 The Essence of Being

Marx defined yet a third avenue of alienation that he referred to as *Species-Being* ([1844] 1983). That is, one was alienated from nature and from the qualities that made them human. In the stories that were shared one theme that seemed to appear through them all was the ability of the craft makers to remain grounded in their humanity. This is aided by their connection and awareness of nature, and by the role that dreams played in craft making projects.

The language, the customs, and the history are all contained within the person who acts as the instrument that combines all the parts into a particular craft. For example, in building a head dress, the craft maker taps into the customs and history that dictates what materials to use and how to use them (like choosing the best feathers or how to put on the horse hair tassels). They also access their language to tell the story and to communicate with the person for whom they are building the headdress. This also refers to dreams and visions or other life experiences of their own or of those that for one reason or another are significant in the making process. Finally, the craft maker channels his or her spiritual beliefs into the actual doing of the process as they are guided

in the creation of the finished product. The craft makers pray and ask the Creator to guide them in making the item.

Dreams are an important aspect of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. They are a link to the spiritual world and to the will of the Creator. Dreams connected craft makers to their world. The significance of dreams was actualized by the craft makers who transferred them to the material world by embedding them in the items they created.

Species-Being (Marx [1844] 1983) is also realized in the way that the craft makers understand their place in the grand scheme of things. Connections are key in the participants' communities. These include connections one has with their surroundings, with their peers or with their very existence in the world. The practice, knowledge, and perspectives that surround craft making are instruments that deter the effects of alienation in modern society. Each of the craft makers shared stories that provided effective resistance to the ways that one might be separated from meaningful ways that they interact with the world.

5.4.4 The Connection Keeps Us Whole

The apex of alienation occurs when man becomes alienated from man. One can perceive examples of this in the day-to-day interactions between people. It is the dehumanizing effect of our modern society that reduces people down to outlets for exchange through the rationalization of relationships. It is ultimately a consequence of money as a medium for interaction and as an indicator of achievement.

There were a number of moments in the participants' stories that showed the contribution that craft work made to challenging alienation in its interpersonal form. Many of the examples came in the form of stories that illustrated cooperation and collaboration between craft makers and those learning from them. The excerpts show that learning and participating in craft was face-to-

face and experiential.³⁷ This approach is based on meaningful interaction and personal investment between people.

There was also the aspect of collaboration between the craft maker and the person receiving the craft. Crafts were customized to suit the recipient in a number of ways. They were built not only in a way that reflected the craft makers themselves but also to recognize the achievements and histories of those who were to receive them.

In terms of how people become alienated from each other in contemporary society, craft work relies on genuine interaction between people. Within the participant's communities and cultures, craft work has created opportunities for people to connect and learn from one another. These connections occurred in a number of ways between the craft makers and their family members, or between the craft makers and their customers. Each connection relied on those involved to know and cooperate with each other in fundamental ways.

The personal accounts of the participants also showed that meaningful interactions and recognition for their skills were significant even where products were created for the express purpose of sale. For instance, in Mrs. Deranger's stories where she calculated that the retail price of an item she had made would equate to around ten dollars per hour of creative labour. Placing an onus on mutual respect for one's creative undertaking in a community is empowering.

³⁷ Covered in the *Learning/Teaching* sections earlier in Chapter Four.

6.0 Conclusion

In order to resolve long-standing conflicts between a colonial and Indigenous spaces, there is a priority placed upon recognizing and legitimizing Indigenous voices in their own context. Drawing the discourse towards a human record defined in material culture helps to direct awareness towards under-recognized perspectives. It can preserve oral histories that may otherwise be lost. Sandra Flood explains that a, “[c]raft’s intimate link with materials and process gives us a neutral standpoint from which to explore its histories. They give access to histories with length and breadth, chronologically and geographically, in a way not possible to the fine arts” (2005:157).³⁸ Flood recognizes the opportunity provided by crafts to give voice to (what is assumed to be) an honest, authentic historical perspective that encompasses the broad milieu of factors and contingencies that might affect one’s life.

Reading the narrative in craft goods created in Indigenous communities requires an ample amount of investigation into the perspectives and lived experiences of those who create it. Understanding the history and the values of the people who create these items broadens one’s interpretation of what these items mean to the people who make them and the people who use them. Interviews indicate that these items (and the stories that go along with them) are inseparable from other aspects of the culture that include language and spirituality.

The use of a critical, anti/decolonial framework was essential in collecting and presenting the data shared by the participants. Anti-colonialism was used to recognize and disrupt my own

³⁸ The term *neutral standpoint* in this quote may at first be read along the lines of the scientific establishment’s effort to force everything into a measurable, positivist, objective framework. This inference does not fit with the concept of histories in a Post-colonial sense, thus, *neutral standpoint*, should be understood as non-antagonistic or empathic, for better clarity.

inherit attitudes and biases and those that might emerge in my journey through the research process. In this way, the sharing of stories by the participants could be seen as decolonial spaces. Within these spaces I was more able to identify and attempt to work through the data.

Participants demonstrated a commitment to ensure the integrity and survival of the traditional knowledge surrounding the manufacture of their crafts. The value of the knowledge held by participants was obvious in the amount of time that they invested in learning and perfecting their skills. It was also apparent that entrusting this knowledge to others was done so in a way that ensured the next generation of craft makers would be likewise committed to sustaining their culture.

Developing an appreciation for the contribution of craft making to society has been a cornerstone of this research. The way that craft making has been illustrated here as a channel through which traditional knowledge can be maintained and transmitted through time can also be extended to other cultures. This area of research can contribute to the sociology of knowledge by further exploring different techniques for encoding knowledge. For example, studying the history of similar craft items or craft making techniques that exist in different cultures may provide an avenue to further explore the way that knowledge is transmitted across cultural lines.

The thematic content and personal experiences that were incorporated in the process of producing craft goods give a vivid expression of the lives of the participants. These themes highlighted a number of different areas. Participants described learning experiences that documented their ways of learning and teaching. Many stories had common themes that reflect shared values between the participants on the topics of nature or spirituality.

In each of these areas craft work was shown to work against the effects of alienation. Craft labour was a means for self-actualization for those involved. Labour remained a resource that was

exercised and controlled as an extension of the craft worker. Craft products were seen as a reflection of the individuals and culture that created them. They reflected themes that cemented the craft makers' identities and contributed to the continuation of the culture. The craft knowledge shared by the craft workers showed a respect and awareness for their relationships to place and space. It helped the craft workers recognize their place in it. Finally, the social networks were built and maintained through participation in craft work. This helped to connect people to each other through family, through collaboration, and through shared cultural identity.

The spaces in which the participants practiced their craft making came to represent anti-colonial, decolonial or even post-colonial spaces. In these spaces the craft makers could exercise their ways of knowing, transfer traditional knowledge, and practice opposition to colonialism. Each of the participants demonstrated their *survivance* in these spaces in the ways that they sustained their traditions and passed them along to the next generation.

Further research can be done to explore each of the themes in more depth. For instance, the theme of nature could be expanded in a comparative study of different cultures. This could be used to investigate the influence of a people's connection to land on their material culture. Additional research can be extended to understand the effect this connection has on social structures within those cultures as reflected in the material culture that is produced.

The resiliency of craft making was apparent in the traditions mentioned by the participants. The knowledge they shared had been passed down and preserved over many generations since before the colonization of Canada. Craft making traditions can contribute to strengthening peoples' connections to their culture thereby making the culture more resistant to external forces.

The use of participant driven methodological techniques such as *photovoice* research (that uses photographs taken by participants as data) could be an especially beneficial tool to further

explore the contributions of craft making. This methodological device can provide visual aids to better illustrate the ways in which the themes that have been identified in this research are materialized in craft produced items. This could be accomplished by recording various aspects of the craft making process and providing images of finished projects.

Sociology, as a discipline, is in a unique position to serve both the academic establishment and Indigenous society. The ontological and epistemological inclusivity of the discipline teamed with currents of reflexivity and deconstructionism, and most importantly the foundational element of critical investigation, invite perspectives that come from outside of the colonial establishment. Together with the growing resurgence of, and observed legitimacy of Indigenous knowledges, contemporary sociologists are privileged to be in a position to expand the scope of Indigenous research. At the same time, however, scholars will be subject, deservedly, to scrutiny of method and application. That is why, as a non-Indigenous researcher working in the context of Indigenous knowledge and stories, I have taken great care to focus on how this research will reflect the knowledge that has been shared in this research.

6.1 Post Script: Reflection

Throughout the literature that I have read over the course of this research and during my entire academic career I have seen very little mention of the effect that a project may have on the researcher. This is especially important as a white researcher entering First Nations spaces. I feel obliged to add my experience here.

I began this research with the feeling that I had a healthy respect and acknowledgement for what it meant to be *connected* to the land. After all, I have spent a considerable amount of my life engaged in outdoor pursuits. This is the folly of the White settler, to envision ourselves as free agents entirely capable of *knowing* and *being* in a world by means of our own free agency. I had

only subtly acknowledged that (like my counterparts in Australia, or the United States, or New Zealand), "...[my] sense of belonging, home and place... is based on the dispossession on the original owners of the land and the denial of [their] rights..." (Moreton-Robinson 2015: 3). Perhaps this is why I laugh about my White privilege when I know that it is not funny. It is the acknowledgement of the absurd reality that the root of my social power is based on the wholly arbitrary jackpot of being born White and male in a settler colony.

I felt my *Whiteness* in ways that I had not been aware of before. At times I felt as if I was trespassing by conducting interviews with Elders. I began to synthesize and critically examine my position as a colonial and what impact this had on my sociological thought. These events were beyond the superficial recognition that another paradigm may exist to understand the world around me, it was the sudden ontological shock that occurs when realizing that my own understanding of the world may not have primacy. To me, this came as a sign that perhaps I had accomplished something substantial, that I had in some small way come to understand or see the contributions of the research participants as they were meant to be understood.

Throughout the course of this project I have been pursuing my own craft making. Constant self-observation recognizes how the things I have learned in the participants' stories have affected it. I have progressed (with significant difficulty) as a braider, more cognizant of the history of its traditions. I am learning all the time, not just the techniques and applications, but the origins and the processes that brought the practice here. A shelf full of books tell me how it has been shaped by the conditions in which it has existed. The decorative woven knots that I tie on the items that I make link to a fantastic and violent history from halfway across the world.

In my academic career, this research has made me wary. I remember attending a roundtable between First Nations Elders and the university administration. The meeting was part of the

campus's *Indigenous Strategy* to make the school more accessible to First Nations students. During the meeting a Dene Elder spoke up with a message that seemed to stop everyone in their tracks. He told the university representatives that they would not be able to make their institution compatible with Indigenous teachings because it was built on greed. I left the meeting that day feeling proud that I had been in attendance for that moment, but also with a measure of cynicism toward the institution that I would represent in my academic work.

From a non-Indigenous perspective, this research has had more of an impact than I had assumed it would. I feel that this is important to note for any researcher attempting to enter the field of Indigenous research as an outsider. I recognized myself listening more to the world around me, taking into account events that might have otherwise appeared random or mundane. After seeing an owl on campus as I headed home one day, I worriedly consulted my supervisor as to whether or not I had made some fatal trespass in my research efforts.

These are the changes that I have experienced over the course of this project. I am honoured that the participants found me worthy to share their stories with. I know that what I understood was only a fraction of what they told me, but I am thankful to have heard it. The knowledge and the experiences that are held by these people are irreplaceable.

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APPENDIX A: Semi-structured Interview Schedule: Moccasin Tracks

1. Knowledge: Sources and Learning

1. What are you making?
2. What is it for?
3. How long have you been doing this?
4. Who taught you to do this?
5. How were you taught?
6. Do you encourage/teach/help people to adopt these skills?

2. Personal Touch, Customization

7. Do you have a signature when it comes to your products? Special materials, designs, or techniques that you use that are unique?
8. What sources do you draw from for inspiration when you make your crafts?
9. How much does the recipient (who you are making the product for) dictate your work?

3. Cultural Connections: Pathways

10. Do you feel that this kind of creative work is culturally specific?
11. Do you feel that the work you do contributes to your culture? To how you know or see the world?
12. What message do you think can be delivered through this work in general?