

Beads: Symbols of Indigenous Cultural Resilience and Value

by

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Abstract

My intention for this paper is to explore the cultural relevance of the influence that beads have had on Indigenous people in North America. By exploring the inherent cultural values that beads possess in Indigenous culture, I hope to illuminate how beads have come to represent Indigenous resiliency after the effects of colonialism and the residential school system. I aim to illustrate how important this art form has been in the past and will continue to be in the future. Beads should not be portrayed as simple trinkets that Indigenous people have sought to trade in the past, instead, they are integral elements to the greater Indigenous society both prior to and concurrent with European contact. Beads are playing an integral role in repairing cultural ties and spiritual beliefs to Indigenous artists. Beadwork has been, and will continue to be significant in representing Indigenous resiliency as well as highlighting the distinct cultural value of Indigenous peoples.

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Introduction

0.1 Debunking the Myth

There is a popular myth that Manhattan Island was purchased by the Dutch for \$24 worth of beads. This simple story illustrates the cultural differences that the Europeans and Indigenous¹ people have perpetuated since contact. The story glorifies the Dutch with their business acumen to purchase land with limitless value, whereas the Indigenous people are left with seemingly worthless glass trinkets. Indigenous groups are identified in the myth as not having an equal value system. The willingness to exchange for something substantial like land, for material items is skewed under Western perception. Alternatively, when viewed with an “Indigenous lens” it could highlight the unmitigated greed of the Europeans to purchase land for their own endeavors, if one does not understand the value of the center of the exchange: the bead. Many scholars and historians have written on the concept of land ownership among Indigenous people in North America, while overlooking the value that beads have within Indigenous culture. My paper is an attempt to emphasize the value of beads, both past and present, within Indigenous cultures across North America. We all know how the story ends, the Dutch got Manhattan Island and the Indigenous people are forcibly removed while only being memorialized with the island sharing their namesake. This monetary exchange may seem irrational from a historical standpoint, but understanding the value in beads could change the Western perception of this myth.

0.2 What Value do Beads hold?

Beadwork and indigeneity identity have a symbiotic relationship. It is hard to separate one from another. I posit that beads, in the form of Indigenous beadwork, is not only a form of cultural value, but also a symbol of Indigenous resiliency. By agreeing with Marshall Sahlins in his argument about Indigenous culture that “despite the terrible losses that have been suffered, the diversity is not dead; it persists in the wake of Western domination” (1994, 414), my intention is to demonstrate how Indigenous artists use transculturation to strengthen their culture. Beads have

¹ From this point on I will use the term Indigenous to refer to all Aboriginal, Native, Amerindian, Métis, Inuit, and First Nations groups that reside on the North American continent. This is not intended to insinuate that all groups share the same culture or beliefs.

been in the cultural forefront of Indigenous people prior to European contact. This paper will summarize my findings on how beadwork continues to influence all forms of Indigenous society. Beads are much more than simple items made of glass or shell, instead they are transformed into units of immeasurable social and cultural wealth. The difference between monetary and cultural value has been difficult for Westerners to incorporate into their monetary ideology. Europeans have capitalized on Indigenous forms of value by reducing social properties into market values which helped to manipulate cultural order (Ibid., 416). My research will provide evidence that further demonstrates how beadwork is transformed from the material into the immaterial, which cannot be qualified with a monetary value. By engaging the act of transculturation, European beads were assimilated “to Indigenous ideas of social ‘valuables’ or sacred kinds” by Indigenous people (Ibid., 415). Indigenous beadwork is not a lost cultural art as Westerners have anticipated, instead it is one that is transformed and influenced by both Indigenous and the larger hegemonic cultural exchange.

0.3 Why are Beads Important?

Beads must be understood from a historical perspective, where I will examine their importance before and after European contact. There is archeological evidence about the historical cultural values that beads played within burial rituals thousands of years ago within Indigenous cultures. Throughout a lifetime, past and present, beads are vital in displaying cultural signals to other members of Indigenous society. Through colonization these signal displays have been restricted through attempted cultural assimilation by the residential school system and western organized religion. Indigenous people had to circumvent these prejudices by inviting non-Indigenous spectators to their own social events that have now evolved into the Indigenous culture event: the powwow. Beads continue to play an important role in how Indigenous people are examined by non-Indigenous spectators at powwows while reflecting cultural value among other Indigenous people. Beadwork is a form of communication that is observed by non-Indigenous spectators during the dance ceremonies at a powwow, but only fully understood by members of the shared Indigenous community. In addition to the dance ceremony, other forms of spirituality and religious ritual are integral to Indigenous beadwork. Artists are inspired creatively through dreams and visions for designs that impart both personal and spiritual value. There is also the tradition of passing on sacred motifs to the next generation of bead artists. By incorporating religious beliefs within beadwork, it infuses pieces of artwork with intangible cultural value.

Woven in the wampum treaty belts, is a history of politics and a complicated value system that owes its existence to beads. Wampum belts were worn in the past as a signal of social and political status among Indigenous peoples. Today they are a symbol of resiliency that reflect the political marginalization that Indigenous leaders have endured throughout the centuries after European contact.

There is an economic element to beadwork within the Indigenous arts and craft market in which beadwork continues to be an important revenue stream to bead artists. In illustrating how cultural value differs from monetary value, I will attempt to establish that both can be combined to support Indigenous communities. Transculturation will also be explored to demonstrate how contemporary art is affected and reshaping the future of modern beadwork, from selling pieces at powwows to featuring artists in national art galleries across North America. Beadwork is become a medium that not only affects Indigenous cultural value, but now has a voice within the Western art world. Indigenous beadwork has a long colonial history of being sold in “foreign” markets. Marking Indigenous beadwork today not only as a colonial artefact. Rather the use beads are a tool to display visual signals of Indigenous resiliency. The creativity of using modern elements has infused the artform with new vitality.

This paper attempts to challenge the non-Indigenous view of beadwork, and reimagine it in its holistic form as a method of artwork that encapsulates every aspect of the life of an Indigenous person, both in the past and in the present. The importance of my research is that there are very few academic sources within anthropology that focus solely on beadwork and how beads are implemented to enhance and display cultural value within Indigenous communities. Many of the photographs in my paper were solicited online via Facebook from other Indigenous bead artists who volunteered to showcase their pride about their culture. There is a large online community of Indigenous bead artists that are expressing themselves with their art. Many artists are like myself, beading an identity of their indigeneity. I am an Anishinaabekwe² who has been raised

² English Translation: an Ojibway woman.

within two cultures: the Anishinaabe³ and the Western. Throughout this paper it has been difficult to solely write empirically. My personal experiences and traditions that I have learned outside of academia also desire representation within these pages; you will hear my voice in the forms of Indigenous teachings and experiences within this text. Finding academic sources that affirmed my Ojibway beliefs have been difficult and I hope to help bridge the gap between my two cultures with my research. When a person starts to bead they are described within my culture as starting a beadwork journey. I have been on this journey since I was 14 years old, almost 30 years. This paper strives to take you, the readers, on their own journey, a journey that Indigenous people have been on before the West acknowledged it.

³ English Translation: an Ojibway person.

Chapter 1

Indigenous Origins of Bead Cultural Value

1.1 Pre-European Contact

Beadwork has always been an important part of Indigenous artistic expression previous to colonial expansion. Millennia passed where Indigenous people were making beads out of resources that were Indigenous to the land. Beads were made from shell, bone, pottery, copper, claws, nuts, seeds, hoofs, horns, fish vertebrae, pearl, teeth, stone, and fossil crinoid stems (Belcourt, 2010, 8; Dubin, 2009, 263). Beads were used to embellish clothing and everyday objects. Indigenous artists created many styles including patterns that resembled animals, geometric shapes and abstract floral patterns (Belcourt 2010, 8-9). With a variety of bead types and both spiritual and natural inspiration, beadwork varied across the continent.

Beads may have been an indicator of wealth or prestige as hypothesized by archeologists who recently exhumed a nearly 4,000-year-old grave of a shísháhlh Nation chief (Pringle 2017). The body of the chief was lain to rest in a “ceremonial bead garment weighing more than 70 pounds” (Ibid.). The chief was completely covered in over 350,000 small stone beads, which archeologist, Brian Thom, from the University of Victoria attempted to replicate using traditional tools, discovering it took over 13 minutes for him to make a single bead (Ibid). The remains of a young adult woman were also found buried in the same area, still wearing a “gleaming shell necklace” and thousands of tiny shell beads, approximately two and a half times larger than a grain of sand (Ibid.). There are thought to be hair adornments, as they were found “in the sediment around her skull” (Ibid.). Despite consulting with “bead experts around the world” the archeologists are not clear how the beads were made (Ibid.). Another grave that was unearthed; which contained the remains of two young men, possibly twins, who shared their internment with 2,200 stone and shell beads (Ibid.). Alan McMillan, an archeologist from Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, states that “in a cashless society, where hours of labor equate to value, the beads represent ‘a fantastic concentration of wealth’” (Ibid.).

The quality and quantity of beads could represent a social status within Indigenous groups thousands of years ago where this “system of production is the relative form of an absolute

necessity, a particular historical way of meeting human requirements” (Sahlins 1994, 413). Burial ritual is evidence of a social hierarchy and the production of beads were necessary to empathize the dead’s important status. Prior to European contact, “white, black, and red exotic substances moved hundreds of miles across exchange networks from their ascribed places of origin in distant regions where mythic time and space converged, at least from the ideational perspective of the recipient local community” (Hamell 1992, 458). Much like precious metals in the form of jewelry are used today to showcase that someone has wealth and prestige, beads have played an integral part in displaying an equal cultural value among Indigenous people

1.2 New Beads, New Values

Beadwork and the value systems they centered on were transformed by the introduction of glass beads when Europeans arrived on the North American continent. Beads were quickly realized to be a form of important currency and highly sought after by the Indigenous people. Christopher Columbus used beads to convert the Arawek people to Christianity. As he put it in the earliest entry about glass beads in October 1492:

“...in order to win their friendship and affection of that people and because I was convinced that their conversion of our Holy Faith would be better promoted through love than through force, I placed some of them with red caps and have some strings of beads which they placed around their necks, and with their trifles of insignificant worth that delighted them and by which we have got a wonderful hold on their affections (Dubin 2009, 273).”

Beads were a delightful object that deepened the affection between the Indigenous people and the Europeans that had just landed. Yet clearly Columbus did not understand the value that beads held for the Indigenous people. In comparison to their souls, which is a foreign concept, beads held much more value. Beads were tangible and could be used, a soul was a Christian ideology that did not fit into their belief systems. The language Columbus used is belittling his Indigenous “converts” with the phrase “trifles of insignificant worth”. The discourse has been set immediately after European contact that beads hold no value and are easily used as tools to seduce Indigenous people into the European value system. For the Europeans, beads are merely trinkets, which will be used in trade and conversions, but to the Indigenous people they are objects that can increase status through expression.

The value and rarity of beads increased with the introduction of glass beads, unseen prior to European contact. These new glass beads came in colors that were previously unavailable; popular colors included white, black, red, green, or blue (Hamell 1992, 460). Beads quickly became a trade item which replaced the materials that were traditionally used in beadwork, they were easily transported in sacks, where one red bead became known as the “cornaline d’Aleppo, or Hudson Bay’s beads” where six beads were the equivalent to one beaver skin (Dubin 2009, 276). Some beads still retain their names that they were nicknamed centuries ago. “Pony” beads, for example, were introduced by the French in 1675 (Ibid.). They were smaller than the first trade glass beads that are were named because they were carried by traders on ponies (Ibid).

The traders also brought other useful items used in beadwork, such as fabric in the forms of colored wool, stroud, and velvet fabrics, and new metal needles (Belcourt 2010, 9). Linen thread was a prized item as well (Ibid.). Prior to European contact, beadwork was a slow and a difficult process that involved making holes with a bone awl, stringing the handmade bead with stiffened animal sinew (Ibid., 38). Figure 1.1 is a picture of real animal sinew, which is made from animal tendon.



Figure 1.1

I know from personal experience, that sinew comes in varying lengths and will rot away if not stored correctly. In contrast, linen thread will keep indefinitely and comes in spools where you

can cut your desired length. The innovative beading tools that Europeans brought were desirable with their durability and ease of use. Overseas bead manufacturers introduced smaller beads for trade. The seed bead introduced in the 18th century was even smaller than the pony bead of the 16th century (Ibid, 8).

The American explorers, Lewis and Clark, noted that members of the Clot Sop Nation requested to trade sea otter skins for some coveted blue beads. Unable to provide the Indigenous men with their request, they counter offered with a “watch, handkerchief, a bunch of red beads, and a dollar...” which was refused. Instead, the Indigenous men wanted beads they described as “tia-co-mo-shack” described as blue “chief’s beads” (Dubin 2009, 276); both sides of the trade were thus left empty-handed. These transactions show us that there a value system had been established between the trader and the Indigenous population. Different colors and sizes were important in creating the beadwork that they had visualized thus creating more value for specific beads. The use of the term “chief’s beads” indicate that some beads held more value on their own than other beads. These imported goods increased the variety of beadwork resources among the Indigenous communities and influenced trades. For the Indigenous bead seekers, a watch was useless, as it was a symbol of status only among European settlers, it held no value within Indigenous society. The increased variety of beads, impacted historical cultural connections.

1.3 How Give-aways Unsettled the European Settlers

Gift giving is important within any society, and Indigenous groups often participated in massive giveaways which were performed by their chiefs or leaders. One had to amass a large amount of useful goods to show their generosity and status. Before European contact gift exchanges could include items such as looms, baskets, textiles, leather goods, plants, animals, shells, skins, food and medicines; afterwards the goods came to include manufactured goods (like beads and cloth) and alcohol (Barrett and Markowitz 2004, 324).

A give-away was and continues to be not just a show of wealth, it is a traditional ceremony that expresses balance and the importance of reciprocity (Belcourt 2010, 9). This was vital for a subsistence economy, where this “is not the exchange for profit or competition but the sustenance of individuals, families, and the communities” (Kuokkanen 2011, 219). From a

European perspective, the give-aways were not commercially viable, since there was no discernible monetary profit. Europeans initially had to learn the gift-giving economy and manipulate it for their commercial benefits. (Barrett and Markowitz 2004, 324). Gift exchange was used by Europeans to “to guarantee loyalty from tribes and chiefs, to buy service from Indian leaders, to counter influence from rival colonial governments, and to foster trade” (Ibid.). Despite learning how to work within this subsistence economy, Indigenous economic practices were still observed as being obsolete.

During the 1800s, The Kwiakiutl bewildered their Indian agents by amassing a large amount of goods that they then distributed among their group. These items included decorative goods such as silver and brass bracelets; and functional trade goods such as washbasins and Hudson Bay blankets (Sahlins 1994, 436). Figure 1.2 shows a Blackfoot Chief wearing a Hudson Bay blanket circa 1927.

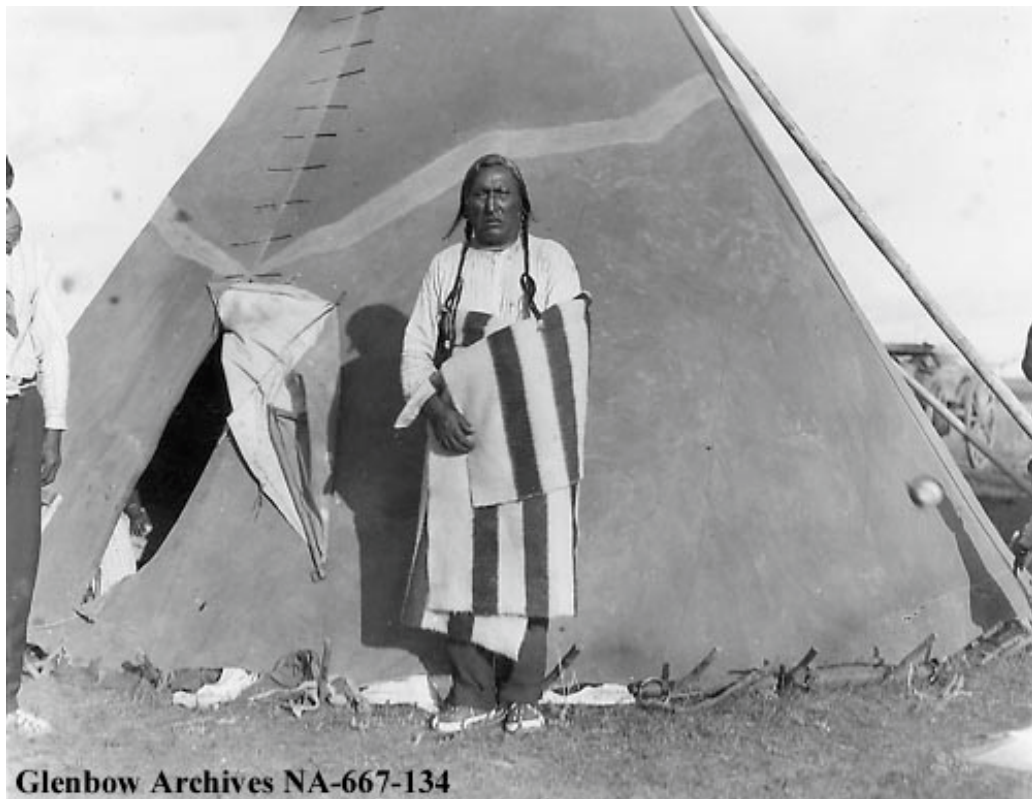


Figure 1.2

Owning a blanket was a status symbol and served as a necessity against the harsh winters. The Hudson Bay Company were aware of their market while trading with Indigenous groups, such as

the red beads mentioned earlier. In addition, their fabric was highly prized among Indigenous groups for its usefulness. It was not just blankets by the Hudson Bay Company that were sought out by Indigenous people, but also the dark blue trade cloth that was easy to bead and would wick moisture away from the body. This trade cloth was considered to be so useful by the Cree that they named it “manitou wayan” or “spirit cloth” (Belcourt 2010, 39). The introduction of European goods slowly transformed what was valuable within the Indigenous population. Traditional items like animal hides and sinew were still used, but the ease of beading with Hudson Bay providing the cloth, thread, needles, and beads modified beadwork to reflect the era that the beadwork artists were living in, a time of global trade and an expanding world. The Hudson Bay Company’s contributions are described by Sahlins as being irresistible, “the relations and goods of the larger system also take on meaningful places in local schemes of things” (Sahlins 1994, 413). The blankets and beading materials provided were utilized to increase the cultural value within Indigenous society.

Indigenous beadwork was not just for Indigenous consumption or giveaways. Instead, it soon made its way into Europe and captivated the market. Along with the coveted glass beads, traders also brought European artistic influences from the Netherlands, Germany, England, Sweden, and France (Dubin 2009, 286). Trading posts became an influence on the floral motifs on Indigenous beadwork since Indigenous women gained access to European floral embroidery in various fabrics and wallpaper patterns (Belcourt 2010, 37). Unfortunately, the floral style was not just implemented due to inspiration. Instead, young Indigenous women were taught how to embroider and appliqué using “mainly floral designs of the French Renaissance” in Quebec mission schools (Dubin 2009, 286). With the ease that the new European beading supplies provided and inspired (or enforced) European influences, large amounts of beaded items were made for personal or economic use intended for sale at foreign markets (Ibid, 9).

Victorian needlewomen especially loved the floral design as flowers were equated with the “feminine’ qualities of fragility, beauty, and godliness” (Phillips 2012, 341) and many articles were written during Victorian times praising Indigenous women on their beadwork ability (Ibid, 356). Indigenous beadwork became popular with non-Indigenous women as it became to represent their own success in colonizing the Indigenous people. The Canadian Handicrafts Guild worked to preserve Indigenous beadwork mainly because “the guild appropriated

Indigenous arts into a narrative of Canadian history that positioned their makers as forerunners and authenticators of a triumphant settler society” (Phillips 2012, 347). Victorian women were reacting to the effects of the Industrial age and clinging to Indigenous made items as it reminded them of a simpler time. Indigenous people, like their own worlds around them, were also “disappearing” around them (Ibid, 331, 341).

Many women and men created beadwork anonymously that is now displayed in museums across the world. There are plenty of Indigenous beadwork examples with “Artist Unknown” in the Art Gallery of Ontario, Royal Ontario Museum, and the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto from my experience. Beautiful, intricate beadwork, made by Indigenous artists centuries ago, that traded or sold their art to feed their families. This paper however is not only an homage to past, often anonymous, Indigenous artists. My intent is to provide a brief historical base to help frame the current identity of Indigenous artists today – the artists that are still beading to feed their families and are still influenced by and selling to both their traditional and “foreign” markets.

1.4 Contraband Culture within Residential Schools

The cultural value of beads continued to be a symbol of indigeneity throughout colonialism.

Wearing Indigenous beadwork was a consistent symbol to settler colonists that there was a resiliency despite the enduring hardships. When the residential school system was implemented across the United States and Canada, beadwork was a visible signal that could be removed from the incoming students.

The residential school system was first conceptualized by organized religion across the continent. Prior to the official government act churches had implemented mission school nationwide. The first Roman Catholic boarding school for young Aboriginal boys was opened near Quebec City in the early 1700s, whose mission was to “civilize” and convert their wards (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015, 50). With the Jesuit priests helping to make wampum belts and previous mission school teaching young women how to bead French renaissance embroidery, it would appear that the church embraced acceptable forms of Indigenous art among their congregation. Mission schools were the prototypes that the future government-sanctioned residential schools would emulate. The Infant School opened in 1829 at Credit River and they were initially taught in both English and their Indigenous language, but by

1858 a teacher desired to “burn or destroy all Indian books, and to put an end to talking Indian in school” (Prochner, May and Kaur 2009, 93). Indigenous attire was repressed, even to the extent that Western made goods were not allowed, as a visitor noticed an odd rule posted in the school that stated, “no blankets to be worn in school” (Ibid., 92). One can speculate about the child that imitated wearing a blanket much like his relatives at home would wear. Clearly the slightest display of Indigenous behavior was prohibited.

The discourse that surrounded native people were influenced by Western philosophers like Jean Jacques Rousseau. The philosophy of the differences between “men” and “savages” were polarizing Europeans read passages such as this: “for one can desire or fear things only by virtue of the ideas one can have of them, or from the simple impulse of nature; and savage man, deprived of every sort of enlightenment, feels only the passion of this latter sort. His desires do not go beyond his physical needs” (Rousseau 1992, 26). The passage above is one of the few ideologies that the settler colonists brought with them. Indigenous people were considered savages who only have natural impulses; where not enlightened; and only required physical care. The residential school system was a method to remedy this “problem” They took away their natural impulses (cultural imagery), attempted to enlighten them via religious ideology, and gave very basic physical care.

Indigenous people were so deeply entrenched in their culture and spirituality that the government, in conjunction with various churches, took responsibility to “re-educate” the Indigenous children per John A. McDonald’s 1883 address to the House of Commons:

“When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015, 2)”

Literacy of English or French, was no longer enough to remove the “savage” label, there had to be no cultural ties to Indigenous culture in order to become a Canadian. The cultural genocide that ensued included all items Indigenous, beadwork was not spared.

Indigenous children across Canada were shipped to residential school from 1892, with the last residential school closing in 1996 (Elias, et al. 2012, 1561). Many of the children's voices of their experiences were never documented, but the survivors of today are sharing their experiences. Survivors recall that no article of clothing or beadwork brought from home was allowed at their residential school as late as the 1950s as many recounted having clothing items thrown in the garbage or taken away from them upon entry (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015, 39-40). Items could be as precious gifts received from their family like a pair of beaded moccasin or a fully beaded leather fringe jacket (Ibid.). The beadwork is a not only a symbol of love but also one of hope, that their children would not forget the parents or their families. The loss of the jacket is especially jarring to me because as an Anishinaabe woman the leather jacket represents a very high honour. As Peter White, an Elder from Noatkamegwanning Whitefish Bay First Nations explained that "to receive a beaded smoked hide jacket is one of the highest honours bestowed upon an Anishinaabe person (Belcourt 2010, 30). Figure 1.3 is a modern example of a beaded hide jacket.



Figure 1.3

It is unknown whether the school administration could have even recognized the cultural significance of a jacket worn by that little boy, did they understand that this boy was loved and valued? The beaded jacket symbolized that despite the circumstances, the expression of love could be worn in the form of beadwork.

The degradation did not stop for the residential school survivors after changing their appearance and language to the hegemonic Canadian standard of civilization. Indigenous children received the same substandard treatment that previous generations had received, albeit in a new industrialized form that included poor nutrition and inferior education, set in building that are described as “badly constructed, poorly maintained, overcrowded, unsanitary fire traps” (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015, 43). Children often attempted escape in fear of the school’s discipline policies (Ibid, 120). Pauline Dempsey, a residential school survivor from the Blood Reserve, attended the St. Paul’s Anglican Indian Residential school between 1934-1942 (Dempsey 2011, 22). Along with three other girls, Dempsey attempts to escape but the girls are returned to the school where they are disciplined by being beaten “with a three-inch width slab of tractor belting” which is so heavy by the time the third girl was being punished “the matron was swearing from the exertion (Ibid, 24).

The children were constantly monitored and any Indigenous artistic expression was a challenge to their colonial education. Robert Cootes of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations recalls his residential school experience where “whenever we got any artwork from home or beads or anything like that, they were pretty much confiscated” (Leeuw 2007, 355). Beadwork and the act of beading linked the children to their community, thus any form of beading became contraband. This Foucauldian dystopian world that was residential school stripped away all agency from children, their connections to their families were removed, their language was banished, and they had no ownership to their own mentality or physicality.

The trauma experienced was intergenerational and the impact is still being felt today. In their study, Elias, et. al, discovered that older generations that have experienced residential school, and witnessed their offspring going through the same traumatic experience, were three times more likely to attempt suicide or have suicidal thought (Elias, et al. 2012, 1566). My immediate family was lucky to escape the intergenerational trauma of residential school. My father was not registered to the Anglican Church by my grandparents when he was born, since they realized the

connection between the record keeping of the church who reported the children to the government after they were baptized. My father was hidden every year when Indian Agents came to collect his older brothers and sisters to ship off to residential school. I was born in 1975 and my Anishinabek cousins were also sent to residential schools. Fortunately for my family we lived in the urban area of Thunder Bay and were excluded, but to ensure that we had no government schooling, my parents enrolled my siblings and I in a private Baptist school. Indigenous families across Canada were impacted by the residential school system and were let looking for ways to facilitate healing. Beadwork is currently being used to heal residential school survivors to help bring meaning back into their lives and hope into their communities.

Chapter 2

The Resiliency of Indigenous Beadwork

2.1 POWWOWS

Contemporary Indigenous life is proving that Victorian fears were unfounded. Despite witnessing the cultural genocide that Indigenous people endured during colonization, Indigenous culture and identity is resurging, facilitated through Friendship Centers and organized social events. This chapter will explore how beads are symbolic to Indigenous resiliency proving Indigenous beadwork holds the same cultural value as it did in the past. There is still a worldwide market for the art form of authentic Indigenous beaded items. Beadwork is commonly sold and displayed prominently during the major Indigenous social event: The Powwow.

As an Indigenous woman, I would stand behind my statement that the Powwow is the social event of the year. This is a combination of our tent revival, our debutante ball, our family reunion. The powwow is religious, it is ceremony, it is a space of indigeneity that falls into a temporal zone where we revert to having power over our identity. Throughout my entire life, everywhere that I have lived within the United States and Canada, we have always made a major effort to go to the Powwow. Yet the contemporary Powwow is not free from the effects of colonialism. Powwow participants are creating a “sacred space” often in public areas like school gyms or fairgrounds. By congregating, Indigenous people are participating in “an exercise in the creation of sacred space, not only in terms of the sacralization of profane area for the purposes of dance, but also to engage in the political act of asserting an aboriginal presence seen as inherently part of the landscape” (Kelley 2012, 118). By repurposing spaces to express Indigenous identity and beliefs, the Powwow is a symbol of cultural resiliency.

What makes the Powwow so important, both religiously and socially, is that Indigenous people honor tradition during the Powwow weekend. Many ceremonies are performed including “holding a pipe ceremony, honoring a veteran or esteemed visitor, having a memorial for a deceased relative, or recognizing tribal people who have distinguished themselves by earning a college degree or other accomplishments” (McMaster and Trafzer 2004, 274). Dancing is a

ceremony, and is the main attraction for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants, for powwows are a shared space where non-Indigenous people attend to observe and witness the Indigenous display of tradition. The powwow mirrors the existence of Indigenous people across North America where they are permitted to be “Indian” with the permission of an omnipresent “white gaze”⁴.

Indigenous people were prohibited to gather and participate in activities that seemed threatening to white settlers religious or economic beliefs (Buddle 2004, 40). It was not until Indigenous people demonstrated performativity that was acceptable to the “white gaze” in the forms of agricultural shows and “wild west” shows where non-Indigenous people were also invited, that powwows evolved into the form that is witnessed today (Ibid., 51). What occurred was a Foucauldian display of the colonizer’s power insofar as: indigeneity was scrutinized and assessed such that it conformed to the mold of “Indianess”. The surveillance by non-Indigenous observers was a form of discipline that reminded all Indigenous participants that they are still a marginalized people (Foucault 1995, 176). Non-Indigenous attendance is a constant reminder of the same colonial practice where Indigenous people are “unsure whether the white man considers him as consciousness in-itself-for-itself, he is constantly preoccupied with detecting resistance, opposition, and contestation” (Fanon 1952, 197). The powwow is a social display that has been “gifted” to Indigenous people by their colonizers in conjunction with being carefully constructed “to work to divest outsiders of their self-referential views of Aboriginality and to produce and confer prestige on Aboriginally defined forms of cultural capital” (Buddle 2004, 58). Figure 2.1, shown on the following page, is a photograph of Six Nations Powwow earlier this year, where a significant number of spectators are non-Indigenous tourists. Nevertheless, the “white gaze” has not stopped Indigenous people from transforming powwows to display their resiliency and dedication to expressing themselves with art and dance. Powwows are where Indigenous dancers and attendees go to proudly wear and display their (sometimes heavily beaded) regalia.

⁴ I have chosen to call this phenomenon the “white gaze” to represent white settler colonists of European descent, since visible minorities have had little or no influence over Indigenous policies such as the Indian Act.



Figure 2.1

2.2 Regalia

Walking around many powwows throughout my life, at Grand Entry, when all the dancers come out to dance at Powwow, I heard tourists exclaim: “Look at their costumes!” I do my best to educate the non-Indigenous attendee that our attire are not costumes, they are our regalia. Mariette Sutherland from Wiigwaaskingaa First Nation taught Christi Belcourt in an interview that regalia is a “very personal and artistic expression of the dancers’ lives, feelings, interests,

family and spiritual quest...often elements of the regalia are gifts from Elders or treasured people in the dancers' lives who they are honouring and are to be worn with pride and responsibility” (Belcourt 2010, 19). There are so many articles in regalia that have a personal effect that dancers are visually presenting their life stories through their regalia.

Beaded items vary depending on what gender the dancer identifies with but the majority of dancers seek beaded moccasins, hair ties, headbands, aprons, rosettes, wrist bands, knife cases, and bags (Ibid.). Beadwork adorns virtually every dancer present. An outsider might think that a person owns one set of regalia, when in fact, regalia does not have a static existence, it is fluid and changes throughout the wearer's life. As Christi Belcourt describes, she created a new outfit after the birth of each one of her children, because it represented a change that had made her into a different person (Ibid., 23). There is identity in appearance, the Indigenous Saussure sign in regalia, complete with the signifier and the signified that is beyond the “white gaze” at the powwow. A non-Indigenous participant may watch Christi Belcourt dance in a green regalia with red rose bead embroidery, but the fellow band member may see the symbolism of her regalia as a signifier, the signified being the green to represent her child being born in the previous summer, and the roses to honor the passing of a family member named after the flower.

Regalia is its own visual language with signifiers that transcends the linguistic signifiers of Saussure. Visual signifiers are not restricted to the same dimensions as auditory linguistics insofar as, they display signals with a multi-dimensional form (Holdcroft 1991, 57). Beadwork on regalia may represent temporality by harkening back to past patterns with traditional meanings while simultaneously evolving it with modern techniques and tools that show the continuity and future of the art form. It is up to the bead artist to ensure that the vision of the dancer coincides with their identity. As we can see in Figure 2.2, on the following page, this young dancer's regalia represents her age and identity. Bead artist, Melissa Moore, has used the traditional eagle motif and combined it with modern colors. Bright neon colors are combined with traditional geometric patterns.



Figure 2.2

Colors and patterns are not merely adornment, they should be intertwined with their identity and their status as a dancer with other members of the community. When an Anishinaabe artist beads regalia for themselves, they are instructed to use their spirit colors. I have been taught by Elders that if you don't have any colors that have special meaning to you or are unsure what your spirit colors are, you must put tobacco in some water and sleep with it beside your bed. Doing so will ensure that during your dreams your ancestors will come and show you which colors should be worn. Regalia is not just for this dimension, it transcends time and waking reality. Beadwork has impacted every aspect of Indigenous culture including its spirituality.

2.3 Beadwork Dreams

Beadwork patterns and color schemes come to Indigenous bead artists via dreams and are interpreted as a divine intervention. As varied as Indigenous beadwork, are the beliefs where the inspiration comes from. Whereas I, an Anishinaabe woman have been taught that ancestors provide inspiration. Jane, a member of the Standing Rock Lakota, was in contrast called to be a bead artist in her dreams by a spiritual entity called the Double Woman or Winyan Nunpa (Wallaert 2006, 7). The Double Woman mostly invites Lakota women to pursue beadwork, but as her name implies that she has two faces, she represents opposition: “good and evil, woman and child-like behavior, commitment to work and laziness” (Ibid, 7). When Double Woman visits a woman’s dreams she offers beadwork skills that are unmatched, but the other side of the offer is that the woman will not marry nor have children (Ibid.). This conflicts with the traditional roles of being a good woman, a dutiful wife and mother; or literally pursuing your dreams and letting your artistic passion consume your life. Despite the spiritual calling, women are caught in the crux to balance their art and traditional roles, where men actively pursue women who bestow these traditional skills as a social virtue that makes an ideal mate (Ibid., 9). Double Woman’s gift is a quandary that requires the dreamer to analyze the importance of beadwork in their life. The cultural value of Indigenous beadwork continues to be acknowledged by its connection to the spirit world. The sacred tradition of receiving designs in dreams has not been forgotten and is a continued practice among Indigenous artists today. Beadwork designs are regenerated to instill traditional teachings to the next generation. The specific placements of beads are recognized throughout the Indigenous community as a symbol of spirituality.

Not all spiritual dreams are so complex. One of the most famous dreams gave life to the jingle dress, a popular dress style used in powwows today. There are many versions of the story, but they share many commonalities. It originated with the Anishinaabe and it involves dreams. The first version is told by Elder Peter “Gaagaagiibit” White from Noatkamegwanning Whitefish Bay First Nation (Belcourt 2010, 24-25) who recounts the story where a young woman, suffering from pneumonia during the 1600s, sought out a medicine man to help her recover. That night she received a dream from Spirit Sky Woman directing her to make a blue dress, while also gifting her with four songs to give to the men. Before leaving she played the sounds of jingles stating that it was the sound of the Creator (Ibid.). The woman made the dress, covered it in bones and danced while the men sang the songs they were taught. She was healed through this

ritual. In this version, it harkens to a time during the early stages of colonialism where the woman is the center and the holder of the dream's powerful medicine. The version I've been told is that it occurred somewhere between the 1900s – 1920s among the Anishinaabe in Ontario where a young woman had tuberculosis. Her father wanted a cure and had a dream where he was taught the jingle dress, its dance, and the songs. However, he was instructed to use shells instead of bones, but he had no access to them because his family was confined on a reserve. He thus fashioned the jingles out of snuff can lids, which is how jingles are still made today. This version highlights the dream and kinship ties, while also acknowledging the lack of resources due to colonialism. In all versions, the dream works and the Jingle Dress dance is still renown to have healing properties. Figure 2.3 is an example of how the contemporary Jingle Dress is still consistent to the original design.



Figure 2.3

This spiritual tradition is still honored with the dress designer either using metal cones (as pictured) or shells to recreate the healing properties. There are more versions of the story out there, and all versions illustrate the ingenuity of the Anishinaabe bead artist who led by their

dream, would craft the beads from bones, sea shells, or discarded metal in the hope for a better life for their loved ones. The Jingle Dress is a symbol of Indigenous resiliency dancing its way into modernity.

2.4 Symbolic Patterns and Motifs

Another way in which beads are central to the value system of Indigenous groups are patterns and beading motifs. Indigenous bead artists can also be spiritually connected by mimicking natural landscapes or using designs that have been revealed during dreams. The SkyWorld or Skydome is a half-circle motif that is used by Haudenosaunee artists that represents the SkyWorld which is a spiritual origin for their people (Belcourt 2010, 13; Haudenosaunee Confederacy n.d.). Patterns alone were not the only materials used that held spiritual power. The hides used also held onto the spirit of the animal which was sacred to the beadwork:

“In life, the skin had given the animal its form. Wearing it, or resting in its shelter, symbolized and reinforced the constant and powerful spiritual bond between game and the people whose survival depended on the continued generosity of animals in surrendering their lives. Beautifying a dressed skin not only benefitted the human owner but also did honor to the spirit of the animal (Dubin 2009, 286).”

Respecting the animal for giving its life and further honoring the animal’s sacrifice by stitching on beaded patterns that honored the environment shared by both species, was balancing the art between the natural and the spiritual world.

The natural scenery and wildlife that surrounds Indigenous artists offers a plethora of bead inspiration. As a young girl, my bead mentor was a man from church, who showed me how flowers inspire Anishinaabe patterns in beadwork. We were walking by some wildflowers and he pointed out the white and purple flowers on the green grass, he told me to bead those flowers on a green background. That my beadwork should always reflect the beauty that surrounds me.

The Lakota woman mentioned previously, Jane, was also inspired by her natural surroundings after visiting a sacred place named Bear Butte where Cheyenne stories describe a cave inside full of animal spirits (Wallaert 2006, 11). After her visit, Jane is given a dream by Double Woman and she designs and beads a vision bag that combine the natural features of the Bear Butte, ready to give birth to spirit animals, while also honoring both Double Woman, for giving her the dream, and the Holy Spirit to acknowledge her Christian spirituality (Ibid, 12). The bag is

beaded on buckskin and is a compilation of the complexity of spirituality that follows Indigenous people. The beadwork components are a combination of the sacrificial animal skin and the Double Woman dream. The bag leads to the spiritual pattern mixture that symbolizes the natural world of her ancestors and the Christianity of her colonizers.

2.5 Beads of Therapy

There is ritual to beading that binds the community together. Hours that were spent making beads may have equaled monetary wealth in the past, but hours spent beading together build the more important cultural value: Community, Indigenous identity, and healing can all be invoked through the practice of beadwork. Beading starts with Indigenous identity, both spiritually and culturally. By bringing the community of different generations together, it can be a therapeutic display of cultural resiliency.

One of the teachings I've been taught before starting beadwork was to smudge, so that my mind would be clear and all bad energy would be chased away. Smudging is the act of burning sweet grass, sage, or cedar in a smudge bowl, usually a large abalone shell, and using your smudge feather (normally beaded) to surround yourself and your work area with the smoke. Figure 2.4 shows my personal prayer bundle that I use to smudge.



Figure 2.4

Excluding the sage, the shell and beaded feather were given to me by an Elder in my community. The Anishinaabe pray like many other Indigenous people pray across North America. By beginning beadwork with smudging, spirituality is introduced into the act of beadwork and “some teachings are that it is a process of opening our hearts to what is to come in the ceremony and to cleanse us so that we can receive good things from our senses” (Lu and Yuen 2012, 194).

Having a good spirit every time a person beads is not always possible, especially when art is used in therapy, when bad thoughts threaten to consume the individual. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation completed a study which demonstrated that:

“Creative activities like beading, sewing, knitting, and carving are, in the end, spoken about by clients as being therapeutic. They find it grounding, centering, a way of being at peace within themselves. If someone is in turmoil, it’s hard to come to that quiet place of concentrating: doing wonderful work with the hands brings the mind to rest. And with this comes being skilled; it builds skills and this brings self-confidence up a little more knowing they are able to produce this wonderful piece of work (Archibald and Dewar 2010, 8).”

In the past when Saulteaux people were going through the grieving process, they would be handed a piece of sewing or beadwork which seemed to be beneficial because “having sewing in their hands that helped them focus, gave them something to do” (Belcourt 2010, 15). The act of beadwork can transform into therapy or a form of meditation, which I have experienced firsthand. Beadwork allows you to forget the chaotic life that surrounds you, while you create an order with your pattern in beadwork. There is a sense of satisfaction watching a piece of embroidery your visualized manifest itself and that can be healing and calming. Artist Christi Belcourt watched her daughter grieve after losing her father. She changed the beadwork on her moccasins to reflect bear paws to honor her father (Ibid., 17). After Belcourt witnessed watching exuberant beadwork come from a place of pain, she believed that beadwork is “...a form of prayer” (Ibid, 17).

Residential schools created a cultural rift within the Indigenous communities, one that is being repaired by the reintroducing Indigenous language and art. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was funded to deliver support using “community-based healing services and activities which address the intergenerational legacy of physical and sexual abuse in Canada’s Indian Residential School system (Archibald and Dewar 2010, 22). The approach was to combine holistic healing including creative arts, Creative Arts-as-Healing, and Creative Arts-in-Therapy, which was intended for “connecting/reconnecting with culture and spirituality and identity; trauma recover

integrate memories – attachment issues; and building personal resources, confidence and self-esteem” (Ibid, 7). The discovery of their survey by participants was that Indigenous people felt more connected to their culture after learning a traditional craft like beadwork. Along with other cultural crafts, learning beadwork increased a “sense of belonging derived from discovering or rediscovering cultural roots, feeling cultural pride, and learning about the impacts of residential school were deemed to contribute to healing (Ibid., 15). This is also cultural to use beadwork or sewing to conquer pain like trauma much like the Saulteaux did with sewing.

Residential school survivors have also experienced healing by gaining access to beadwork and other items that had previously been in private collections of churches, or museums. The Memory, Meaning-Making, and Collections (MMMMC) initiative is gathering Indigenous items and placing them in the hands of Indigenous seniors (Krpmotich, Howard and Knight 2016, 344). The seniors are able to reflect on their own residential school experiences while debating the quality of beadwork: what constituted good beadwork previous and prior to European contact (Ibid., 355). Even though these Indigenous women were urban and identified with different nations, the effect was that a community was formed while they learned cultural skills by making dreamcatchers, beading, and porcupine quillwork on birchbark (Ibid., 353). The women shared a “collective historical experience” that they were “extremely proud of” (Ibid., 356) and touching other pieces made by anonymous Indigenous people decades ago in conjunction with creating crafts of their own, led them to be “willing to be defined by a cultural identity” and no longer identifying with being a residential school victim (Ibid.).

The prayer and ritual that is beadwork can also be seen in other programs such as the Opening Doors to Reconciliation initiative sponsored by the Canada Council for the Arts, where Six Nations Cayuga artist, Samuel Thomas, held workshops where wooden doors from residential school were beaded with Indigenous designs (Canada Council for the Arts 2017). Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants were invited to join. Thompson has used beading to heal his grief after losing his mother and understood its healing properties, later using beadwork in Kenya to reconcile the loss of cultural objects that had been stolen and burned in front of the colonized African people (Ibid.). The healing properties of beadwork have been with Indigenous people across the centuries and implementing therapy via art is proving to be a gentle healing process for the residential school survivors and members of their communities.

Beadwork is a way for Indigenous people to express themselves creatively and/or spiritually. With the continued effects evident from colonialism and assimilation policies, defining oneself through beadwork is a method of reclaiming indigeneity. Cultural symbolism in beadwork represents the freedom to be proud of Indigenous culture and religion in a post-colonial world. The therapy and prayer found in beadwork is de-colonizing Indigenous artists one bead at a time.

2.6 The Politics of Wampum

So far, I have spoken mainly of the aesthetic, spiritual, and social relevance of beads, arguing that beads are central to Indigenous communities because of their cultural value and as symbols of cultural resiliency. One might wonder how beadwork could be political? How can beads strung together have an impact on Indigenous people on such a large scale? The answer is a simple word but it holds a lot of political responsibility: wampum.

There are different theories of the origin of the word wampum came from: One is that it is a Narragansett word meaning “white shell beads” (McMaster and Trafzer 2004, 147); another theory is that it is an Algonquin term, Wampumpeag, meaning a string of white beads (Barrett and Markowitz 2004, 778). The word was later shortened by the English to “wampum” (Hamell 1992, 456). European settlers incorrectly identified the wampum as a currency, thus once again reducing rich Indigenous value systems to mere monetary value. While wampum did indeed play an important role within the society, it was not, contrary to popular belief, a form of ‘Indian money’ prior to contact. Rather, it served as “personal adornment, a form of tribute, and a means to secure a ransom. Only later did it serve as an exchange medium” (Nassaney 2004, 342). The production of wampum may have been politicized as well as evidence shows that only families with higher status or esteemed lineages were involved in the production of wampum among the Wampanoag people. Production of wampum involved whelks and the Quahog shells depending on the color needed, usually purple or white (Ibid., 349). The increased competition of wampum may have contributed to the start of the Pequot War during the 1630s (Ibid., 348).

The production of wampum may have increased because the belts were used to signal social status. The Iroquois used the belts to denote political status and command respect. Wearing a wampum belt not only symbolized wealth but importance, which was eventually recognized by European settlers. Birgit Brander Rasmussen states that “wampum is part of a narrative and

documentary tradition that the Iroquois have used in diplomacy for generations (Rasmussen 2007, 446). The example given by Rasmussen is an account of a presumed dead Frenchman. Before the French settlers were allowed to negotiate his return, they were approached by one of the Iroquois men, an orator by the name of Kiotseaeton, whose prestige was announced by his body being covered by “beaded strings and belts, known as wampum (Ibid., 446). Kiotseaeton’s appearance denotes his status to the Frenchmen visually with the amount of wampum and heavy decorations that were bestowed on his person. This may not be the gold and pearls that were favored by the European wealthy at the time, but the effect is the same: this was a person who demanded respect.

Wampum was important because the Iroquois nations would use these small beads by weaving them into belts that commemorated events and signified agreements made with other tribes, and eventually the ruling governments (McMaster and Trafzer 2004, 147). Wampum belts were therefore not merely produced for decoration, but instead functioned as a visual signal that the person held certain levels of political power. M.A. Jamies explains the intricate role that wampum played on political life for the Iroquois:

“Wampum was originally used for documentation and record keeping of significant events and agreements, such as treaties between two sociopolitical entities, as well as seals of friendship. They were also viewed as certificates of authority and credentials that guaranteed a message or promise. They were thought of as ritual ratification when accompanying treaties or alliances, which may have involved migration, a prisoner’s ransom, or the extradition of a criminal. The Iroquois used wampum for both official communication and religious purposes (Barrett and Markowitz 2004, 779).”

Wampum’s role within Indigenous society was complex as it defined social hierarchy and communicated cultural values. This is not to say that there is not a form of economic value in wampum, which is to be discussed later in this paper. Rather, I would here like to stress how wampum politically impacted the Iroquois confederacy in their attempt to legitimize their government within North America.

The Teioháte/Two Row Wampum treaty was the first of its kind on what is now North American soil. It was the first treaty between the Dutch and Indigenous governments and is today over 400 years old (Hallenbeck 2015, 350). The treaty is not on a piece of paper, nor is it written in pen or with ink. Rather it is beaded in a wampum belt. The belt is a simple design from an artistic point of view, there is no intricate pattern, rather it is a simple belt consisting of two rows of parallel

purple wampum beads woven as two solid straight lines surrounded by white wampum shells, with fringe on either side (Ibid., 351). Figure 2.5 is a reproduction of the original belt.



Figure 2.5

The symbolism behind the belt represents the two nations, one purple stripe is the Dutch on their European ship, the other purple stripe is a Haudenosaunee canoe, both sailing down the white river that represents Time or Life, parallel to each other but both nations taking the same journey (Ibid., 351; Watson 2015, 4). Every detail of the belt has meaning behind it, the white color represents not only represents the passage of time, but it also “represented, peace, promise, and good intentions (Dubin 2009, 268). The contrasting purple meant the opposite: hostility, sadness, or death (Ibid.), followed by the fringe which was to represent that the relationship between the two nations was “unending” (Hallenbeck 2015, 351).

The political legitimacy is paramount for wampum belts, with Iroquoian council meetings being recorded using wampum, with the Onondaga Nation training “Wampum Keepers” who could recite the various wampum belts so the meaning would not be lost to the people (Barrett and Markowitz 2004, 779). This tradition is still upheld today where clan mothers of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy each have two “Faith Keepers” positions, one male and one female, who are both “well versed in the history of their people so that they can continue to share it with future generations.” (Haudenosaunee Confederacy n.d.). Which such transparency and reverence given to the wampum belt treaties, it is a testament to the continued political marginalization that the Indigenous people received across the continent. Wampum was its own visual language that represented more than beads, it represented a value system for the Iroquois people that was not only political, but also expressed cultural values. These values may have been overlooked by the

Dutch and their preceding European negotiations because wampum did not have equal prominence as the pen and paper.

It isn't stated what sort of wampum belts that Kiotseaeton was wearing when he approached the French settlers, but one could imagine that the wampum belt could have been a reproduction of a long-forgotten treaty (by the Europeans) that gave this Iroquois man his authority to help negotiate for a hostage's return. The Frenchmen may have seen this item as simply adornment, but Kiotseaeton saw it as political power. But where is this translation lost? Birgit Rasmussen argues that it was the way that "literacy" was interpreted by both the Indigenous and European nations.

The Iroquois with their wampum belts meant a legitimate treaty, but this was perceived through a Western lens by the settler colonists. They viewed their form of literacy as the only form of legality whereas, the Indigenous people, coming from a background of oral tradition, understood that memory, combined with wampum, constituted a legal treaty between both parties. Europeans are described as "dazzled" by the lengths of spoken word that Indigenous people could speak back to them during negotiations. A Iroquois council was attended by Cadwallader Colden who stated that "they commonly repeat over all that has been said to them, before they return any answer, and one may be surprised at the exactness of these repetitions" (Rasmussen 2007, 447). With retaining knowledge via Wampum Keepers and Faith Keepers, the Iroquois people prided themselves on their memory for keeping promises, this memory was solidified by weaving the memories with wampum beads into a belt, that could be worn to signify the importance of words. In contrast Westerners developed the written word and have used ink and paper to write down their promises as evidenced in written laws or contracts.

Rasmussen uses the Iroquoian term "Pen-and-Ink Work" to highlight how impressed the Indigenous people were with writing, the word writing is downplayed in the article because it represents the hegemony that our Western education has given to the act (Ibid., 447). Both "pen-and-ink work" and wampum belts tackled the same problem using different methods, the only difference was cultural and which party incurred the political power. Had the Iroquoian Confederacy come to full political power, we might be weaving a modern form of wampum to record our contracts and other legal documentation. The colonizers chose to ignore the cultural

symbolism that wampum represented and discarded the values that it held. Instead, they deemed their translation uncivilized and proclaimed their literacy technology superior.

Wampum was a form of literacy that colonizers would not comprehend. Like the khipu belts of Inkas, the wampum belts were an alien concept of communication to Westerners, who had long ago accepted the written word as the rational medium of communication, whereas the Iroquois:

“conceptualized wampum as a medium of communication that materialized and embodied words. As such, it was capable of carrying the words of a speaker to an interlocutor, just as Europeans understood ink and paper as capable of carrying words from one location to another. With wampum, the word was spoken into and then back out of the beaded string or belt, which functioned as a kind of literary tape recorder (Ibid, 456-457).”

Wampum could not compete when “pen-and-ink work” came to signify reason and the perceived illiteracy of wampum was reduced to savagery. This dichotomy is enforced where the European encounter and colonizers discredit Indigenous forms of communication, with no intention of adapting their systems to include wampum. Eventually the marked difference between the colonizer and the colonized would be the ability to master the English or French alphabet to exchange information (Ibid., 446).

The sociopolitical status that is held by the Two-Row Wampum belt is still being scrutinized today. The authentication and translation of the political importance of wampum is disavowed due to its “context of articulation (Simpson 2014, 99)”. Thus, from the colonists’ perspective the Wampum belt was an inarticulate and incoherent method of communication, further justifying their perception that whatever pact or treaty contain on the belts were as valueless as the beads that they were made from.

Chapter 3

The Cultural Value of Indigenous Economics

3.1 Indigenous Beadwork Markets

My examples about the usage of beadwork within Indigenous culture should not be interpreted that this is only a divine art form that bestows political or spiritual significance. Beadwork also represents economic opportunity for artists both within and outside the community. The ease of using European goods expedited the beading process for artists which helped fuel the tourism industry of Indigenous arts and crafts.

As Nicholas Thomas writes in his book, “Entangled Objects”, the curiosities that travelers brought home from abroad represent both “singular personal meanings at odds with their systemic significance” (1991, 143). Western colonizers would visit exotic places like the Americas, and other colonized spaces all over the world. The souvenirs that were collected not only reminded the collector of their exotic experiences, but also reaffirmed the stronghold of colonization worldwide. The striking contrast between the styles of art between the two worlds meant that “Indigenous artifacts virtually became trophies which reflected the broader experience and mastery of a passage around the world on the part of the traveler” (Ibid.). The experience of traveling to North America and visiting the “Indians” was authenticated by bringing back a piece of Indigenous art, which included beaded items. The acquisition of Indigenous artforms created a non-Indigenous market for beadwork which still exists today.

With the settler colonialism that Canada experienced, tourism to places of interest within Canada were accompanied by Indigenous people selling their wares. Onkwehonwe women would sell large amounts of their beadwork to Niagara Falls tourists to financially support themselves (Phillips 2012, 328). The aesthetics of the Indigenous beadwork styles, combined with the western glass beads, created an object that was both exotic and familiar enough to be coveted as a souvenir. Over time, the independent beadwork seller has been outcompeted by “Indian” shops that have popped up alongside popular tourist destinations. These stores are located in urban centers, like The Cedar Basket Gift Shop located within the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, or rural reserves like the Whetung Ojibwa Centre on the Curve Lake First Nation for the tourists

headed up to their cottages for the weekend. Indigenous crafts are a marketable item that has supplemented Indigenous households for centuries.

Independent vendors have not discontinued their practice of selling, they have adjusted to the changing market and are selling their items at Indigenous gatherings like the Powwow. The marketplace within the Powwow is a unique setting because powwow committees “create a place that affords them the economic resources, political influences, and cultural capital to engage the power system” (Gagnon 2013, 55). Powwows can be the highlight for a vendor for the year for selling their wares. Personally, I know of artisans in my area and that work all year round to sell jewelry and other items exclusively for powwows. A big powwow like the one Na-Ma-Res powwow held annually at Fort York in Toronto can potentially offer thousands of dollars in sales for one weekend, whereas a massive powwow like Crow Fair held in Crow Agency, Montana is anticipating over 50,000 participants this August 2017 and the earning potential depends on the amount of stock the vendor could prepare (Crazy Crow Trading Post n.d.). Figure 3.1 shows a vendor at the Rat Portage Powwow.



Figure 3.1

The powwow committee normally charges vendors a fee determined by the space that they are going to get up at the powwow, which is contingent on the number of spectators that they anticipate on having. Both parties are attempting to make a profit for the powwow to be

economically viable. Vendor tables in Ontario can vary and start at \$30 a day for the smaller events (New Credit Cultural Committee n.d.) and starting at \$250 for larger events (Grand River Powwow 2017). Powwow committees must base their fees on an equitable balance for if the cost of the vendor's space is too high, the vendor will apply for a different space at a competing powwow (Gagnon 2013, 203). The higher the attendance of spectators and participants, the higher the rate for the vendors. The Three Fires Homecoming Powwow and Traditional Gathering, for example, charge \$30 a day for vendors, which is a very modest fee and thus speaks to the lesser popularity of the powwow. The Grand River Powwow's vendor fee is \$250 but the powwow is a more popular social event, despite just an hour's drive between the two events. The popularity of the Grand River Powwow may be that the tourists perceive it as a "native space" being an hour's drive away from the city and being hosted on the Six Nations of the Grand River territory. The reserve could represent a socio-political place where the authenticity of the Indigenous dancers and vendors are reinforced by the surroundings.

The bead artist must decide if vending is the right course for the items they are trying to sell. There are economic opportunities for selling items at the "trading posts" or "Indian shops" that are linked to high areas of tourist traffic, but an artist may have more control of their economic gain if they purchase a vending spot at a popular powwow, but either forms of commerce are reduced to the law of supply and demand. Production of the desired product is crucial in determining how economically viable selling beadwork can be for the artisan. Authentic Indigenous beadwork normally is not produced on an industrial level, and is limited to the confines of home and other personal spaces of its artist.

3.2 Economic and Cultural Production

Beading is an exacting and tedious art form as are other Indigenous forms of art. If one is rolling snuff lids and hand sewing them on a jingle dress, or covering a dancer's apron with beadwork, each item takes up space to produce. Indigenous beadwork is rarely done in an art studio, the majority of this art form is designed and produced in the home.

Tasoulla Hadjiyanni and Kristin Helle interviewed thirteen Ojibwe community members and discovered that craft making was not solely a monetary endeavor. Instead it became "a connective process that fosters social, spatial, cultural, spiritual, and temporal connections

through a series of other interwoven connective activities” (2010, 60). Beadwork and other craft making abilities creates an immaterial/material spatiality which represents the rebuilding of family after the past historic trauma that Indigenous people have endured. The ability to maintain a home enables the Indigenous artist to reclaim a part of their agency, an immaterial value, that was lost due to colonialism and the residential school system. Thus, transforming this craft-making tradition into a material form which materializes as Indigenous beadwork (Ibid, 61).

Production is economic in nature but it represents an immaterial gain for Indigenous artists, after generations were separated due to the residential school system, the creation of the craft in itself is a powerful representation of the material continuity of the past and future:

“Crafts thereby, provide the visual evidence of Ojibwe difference and a materialized continuity of knowledge and practice passed down through generations. As such, Ojibwe crafts are (im)material power symbols imbued with tradition, spirituality and kinship, and the processes associated with craft making support Ojibwe cultural foundations while becoming the medium for a negotiation between different aesthetics and ways of living (Ibid., 65).”

The spatiality that is the home was utilized to make crafts in almost every room of the house, bedrooms are used as storage, beading on the dining table, and sewing in the kitchen (Ibid, 69). The home is a production area but it shares the space with the other family members. By producing beadwork in the common spaces, it normalizes the production of Indigenous art for future generations. It becomes a community activity, not a private economic endeavor. The bead is recaptured and used to not only create economic value but also in the value creation that binds families together and helps build the community, both spiritually and culturally.

3.3 Drawing Value from Beads Today

Before I can analyze the value of beadwork, I must first posit beadwork as a commodity.

Beadwork has been illustrated as having both spiritual and social value to Indigenous people, while Europeans desired Indigenous arts and crafts to appeal to their peers about the authenticity of their New World experience, later settler colonists would use beaded items in a similar manner as an original souvenir for visiting popular attractions across North America. Per Arjun Appadurai “a commodity is anything intended for exchange” (1986, 9). Exchange between Indigenous people though does not simply involve commodities and currency. The commodity

that is beadwork encompasses a temporality that transcends the capitalist view of exchange: “the commodity situation in the social life of any ‘thing’ can be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature” (Ibid, 13). The social relevancy of a beaded item determines the value between Indigenous people. When an Indigenous seller vends to a non-Indigenous person, they buyer may be only regarding the craftsmanship and quality of materials that have been used. When an Indigenous person purchases beadwork, there may be a level of cultural value that is not obvious to the non-Indigenous buyer. The bead motif may be one of a bear claw and the Indigenous buyer could be a member of the bear clan, thus the item holds a kinship tie and a form of cultural value. By wearing the bear claw, it becomes a symbol of bear clan representation. This beaded item could be passed down to another member of the family, or incorporated into regalia. As illustrated above, powwow regalia has social relevancy in ceremony. Resiliency manifests itself in the form of beadwork that may honor a lost relative. The act of being about to form a group and practice traditional dance ceremonies compounds the act of resiliency towards the oppressive government/dominant culture. In this way, regalia embodies cultural value that can be desired and transformed into monetary value by those who do not possess the skill or time to bead regalia. I have observed the sale of full sets of regalia for thousands of dollars. However, in contrast, I have witnessed regalia given to strangers because the dancer had succumbed to substance abuse, and wanted the regalia to be smudged and reinvented. Value is also culturally linked to other items that have even more value which should never be exchanged for profit. Eagle feathers are one of the most highly prized items for Indigenous people, they hold symbolic meanings across the continent for Indigenous people from all nations (Barrett and Markowitz 2004, 287). Eagle feathers hold a much higher value of regalia that Shelley Niro captures in her 1998 movie “Honey Moccasin”. The film’s premise is that a thief is breaking into people’s home on a reserve and stealing all the regalia (Niro 1998). A news reporter is shown, interviewing a woman on the latest break-in and the scene is written to highlight the difference of value

“...I was putting groceries away, I noticed all kinds of beads on the floor. I first I didn’t think nothing of it, but as night went on I noticed there was more and more. I started yelling at the kids for not looking after them better. Anyways I thought it was kind of strange, so I went to the back where I keep all our stuff and I was shocked to find everything was gone. Everything but these, whoever took the stuff doesn’t realize the value of these” (the lady holds up black-tipped eagle feathers) (Ibid).

This short clip illustrates the layering types of value. The value that is mixed with production is shown when the children assumed to having used the beads to produce crafts and it isn't until the mother believed it is excess waste that she considered the beads' value as lost. Beads can be implemented in beadwork to equal monetary value and potential income, so the waste of beads constitutes an investigation by the mother. The regalia has complex cultural value but it evolves over a lifespan, and can be replaced and made into a signal, telling the story of the loss at the next Powwow. Fortunately for in this story, their most valuable items were not stolen, the eagle feathers. The eagle feathers symbolize value that is separate from monetary value; they represent the social cultural values that are both material and immaterial. This simple scene in a modern film showcases the levels of value that are in Indigenous beadwork. The beads represent monetary value, which can be replaced. The regalia represents cultural symbolism that holds value, but can be transformed to tell a story of loss and renewal. Lastly, the eagle feather holds the utmost value in that its value is cultural and spiritual value.

Conclusion

Since contact, Indigenous people have utilized the new technology that the Europeans brought with them to benefit the production of beaded items. The colonization of North America brought cultural dominance in the forms of Western religion and value systems. Indigenous people were outcompeted for resources due to settler colonialism, while their children were assimilated and found themselves unable to practice traditional culture or speak their own language. The current generation of Indigenous people are struggling to piece together the fragments of their culture that was taken away from them.

Beadwork is transferred culturally from a beaded leather fringe jacket, to a beaded jean jacket. Transculturation is also evident in powwows with many women dancing the jingle dress dance, without having any Anishinaabe ties to its origins. The jingle dress is not culture appropriated. Rather, it has been turned into a symbol of Indigenous solidarity. The Indigenous person's culture today is experiencing this phenomenon as explained by R.A. Rogers:

“Transculturation, as conceived here, calls not only for an updating of the understanding of contemporary cultural dynamics but also for a radical reconceptualization of culture itself: as conjunctural, relational, or dialogic; as constituted by, not merely engaged in, appropriative relations; and as an ongoing process of absorption and transformation rather than static configurations of practices” (2006, 495).

Either through beadwork or other ritual practices, it is an impossibility for Indigenous people to go back to the traditional ways of the past. After experiencing settler colonialism and the residential school system, our culture has been irrevocably impacted. We can see the changes of this impact through Indigenous art forms that are a combination of the past and the future. The art reflects the relational changes that occurred between the dominant Western culture and the marginalized Indigenous culture. The dialogue that surrounds beadwork is not one that harkens to the past, but uses beadwork for soothing tormented minds and creating a new future. The dreamcatcher, a symbol with Anishinaabe origins, is being adopted by many different nations and it is now a popular symbol to represent indigeneity across the continent and beyond. (Barrett and Markowitz 2004, 232) Figure 4.1, shown on the following page, illustrates how modern beadwork showcases both iconic Indigenous and Canadian symbols: the dreamcatcher and the Toronto Blue Jays.



Figure 4.1

Carving out a new identity that combines both the traditional teachings yet acknowledges our roles in so-called modernity proves to be a difficult balance. After centuries of fighting for each piece of our culture, for our right to express or create it, it is no wonder that cultural appropriation is such a controversial issue when it pertains to Indigenous people today.

North American Indigenous people reflect their culture using beadwork on personal items such as jewelry or attire, and professional items such as beaded pen covers or lanyards. This use of beadwork which is so entrenched with Indigenous culture, sends a signal to the rest of the world that the wearer is not afraid to display their indigeneity.

Due to the cultural trauma that was experienced with the residential school system where no items associated with indigeneity could be worn, the market targeting Indigenous customers is growing. There are companies like Manitobah Mukluks, that are Indigenous owned, who are using the global marketplace to sell authentic, Indigenous designed products worldwide while

also giving back to the community (Manitobah Mukluks n.d.). I attended a Manitobah Mukluks Moccasin Workshop in 2015 at the Bata Shoe Museum in downtown Toronto. The workshop was run by the same Cree woman who had taught beadwork at our Friendship Centre. While this is a singular experience with Manitobah Mukluks, I was encouraged by their ability to help teach Indigenous people how to make traditional crafts, and hiring local artisans to facilitate the learning. Manitobah Mukluks is featured on local cable shopping networks, and one can witness thousands of pairs of Indigenous designed footwear being bought by the general public.

Indigenous style is a subculture that is represented by wearing symbols that are recognized as possessing Indigenous identity. This is often expressed by wearing large beaded earrings, which in the past were reserved for special events like powwow. But today, the younger generation of women are wearing them proudly at school and work, outside of Indigenous areas.

This is something I have used myself as a way to signal my indigenous identity. When I attended my master's mixer here at University of Toronto, I wore a pair of large, beaded Indigenous earrings to the event. Halfway through the event I was approached by another Anishinaabe woman who introduced herself and wanted to know what my nation was and where I got my earrings. It wasn't a closed experiment but in hindsight I realize now that in my choosing to wear those earrings, I was placing my indigeneity as an aspect of myself, so those familiar with the same forms could recognize or acknowledge my culture. Per Dick Hebdige this could be a representation of my Indigenous subculture where I used my style as intentional communication. My earrings were speaking a separate language with "the communication of a significant difference". Indeed, the parallel communication of a group identity, is the 'point' behind the style of all spectacular subcultures. It is the superordinate term under which all the other significations are marshalled, the message through which all the other messages speak (1991, 102).

Contemporary pieces of Indigenous beaded jewelry are their own form of communication to other Indigenous people. They signify that the wearer is either another member of the community or has at least a minimal appreciation of Indigenous art. Figure 4.2, shown on the next page, is an example of modern Indigenous earrings.



Figure 4.1

The wearer may also signal that they have participated in larger social events like a Powwow. As an artist wearing their own work, it may speak to their amount of knowledge of cultural practices like beading or quilling.

The Indigenous style of beadwork is finding new life in museums and art galleries across Canada with current artists that express themselves both politically and socially. Their works of art are not just anonymous pieces from curiosities collections from centuries ago, these are expressive pieces that represent the Indigenous struggle between colonialism and tradition. Nadia Myre, created “beading bees” where 230 bead artists came together and beaded the Indian Act over a three-year period (Fowler 2010, 351). This harkens to the political act of wampum belts, but it is translated through Indigenous eyes, the politics of confederated Canada beaded back into indigeneity. Indigenous beadwork and the story of its journey is being told so that the history and the future of Indigenous people are acknowledged.

I hope this beadwork journey has shown how the creativity of resilience is showcased throughout Indigenous beadwork. Indigenous bead artists are combining both historical and modern influences in their artistic visions. Bead artists still carry on the sacred traditions of prayer and dreams to guide them. At the same time, the incorporation of mainstream logos into their art signals their capacity to integrate, creatively re-interpret, and to some degree also repossess dominant cultural symbols on their own terms. Beadwork encompasses every aspect of Indigenous life, it transcends temporality and spatiality. Like the Double-Woman spirit, there are two sides to beads within the culture: beadwork embodies both the traditional past and the contemporary future. It is a cultural value and a symbol of resiliency that Indigenous people have fought for throughout the centuries after European contact. Each piece of culture can be beaded together until the sacred pattern is complete.

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