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Abstract

The Cordillera region of the Northern Philippines features ethnolinguistic weaving traditions which are now moving towards extinction. A practitioner-led research project developed a weaving tool-kit to support the preservation of weaving traditions, but further questions regarding the status of women textile workers arose as a result. The habitus of the researcher as a part-time textile lecturer created an interweaving between the differing, yet connected project participant experiences. Discourse analysis of participant observation data, community workshop reflections and documentary photography enabled a methodology to evolve which articulates the raw understandings this research raised. A research question asked: *How can craft generate economic opportunities and enhance livelihoods for women?* The findings and end point of this article propose that Bourdieu's theories of practice are a useful framework through which textile workers can understand more clearly the different forms of capital their roles embody.

Keywords: Bourdieu; textiles; weaving; discourse analysis; higher education; decolonization

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Introduction

Textile postgraduate education embraces a range of education contexts and is an expansive professional field which includes industrial, artisan, craft and designer practices. The social and material nature of textiles is leading UK based academic programmes to undertake to make their textile courses decolonized and to be supportive of international collaboration, circular economies, and to address UN sustainable goals. Practitioners who research, practice and teach, are particularly well placed to undertake project opportunities such as the British Council *Crafting Futures* programme "which aims for a sustainable future through making and collaboration" (British Council 2021). An opportunity arose in 2018 for the author, who met the required programme characteristics to participate in a *Crafting Futures* project based in the weaving communities of the Northern Philippines Cordillera region. The project was entitled *Creating a Sustainable Textile Future for Women: Digitizing Cordillera Weaving Tradition* (CSTFW) and began with the research question *How can craft generate economic opportunities and enhance livelihoods for women?* The project involved a short research visit and follow up work which took eighteen months to complete, between 2018 and 2020. The author, while part of a larger project team, reflects personally in this article how practitioner reflection and structural research methods, can enable a complex picture of textile practice, research and education to be created.

The CSTFW project sought specifically to develop a weaving tool-kit to support the preservation of an extant weaving tradition. The creation of woven teaching samples developed from extant textile material enabled a new position from which to consider the role of textiles in relation to the "future of craft by understanding its value in our history, culture and world today" (British Council 2021). Within the Cordillera region of the Philippines and other global *Crafting Futures* contexts, elderly community artisans may be the last generation to pass on traditional craft knowledges in oral traditions. The CORDITEX project from the University of the Philippines Baguio led by Professor of Social Anthropology, Dr. Analyn Salvador-Amores established that there is a body of textile patterns which can no longer be woven by the Itneg ethnolinguistic community weavers who have traditionally woven cloth as part of their intangible cultural heritage. A cluster of Itneg communities still live in a lowland area named Manabo, near the Abra delta in the Cordillera region. The Itneg community during the Spanish colonization of the Philippines, from 1521 until the Philippine revolution in 1896–1897 were not recognized as a distinct population are were given

the name Tinguian, along with all the other people from the Cordillera mountains.

The Itneg communities today preserve their culture through a hybrid of traditional practices and Christian religion. Itneg woven textiles are regarded specifically as testimonies of the Itneg culture with distinct floating warp and supplementary weft woven patterns celebrating Itneg life. Itneg weaving was initially constructed on nimble and transportable backstrap looms until the point where the Spanish colonizers introduced large European style floor looms. Itneg textiles such as funerary blankets are a feature of global museum collections and literature (Aquino 2005; Cole 1922; CORDITEX 2019; De las Penas and Salvador-Amores 2016; Eggan 1956; Johnson and Yushan 2012), however due to changes in culture and work practices, traditional Itneg weaving many methods, have been lost. The *Crafting Futures* programme supports British practitioners to participate in projects within international craft communities, with research questions posed to address problems which are connected to the losses of craft traditions and knowledges. *Crafting Futures* as a programme, has arisen within the decolonized paradigm shift and seeks to explore the definitions and boundaries of design (and craft) as they shift in global discourse (Crosby 2019, 63).

Design practitioners who have grown into research from creative practice origins and who are within the first six years of their first academic appointment, have been identified as in particular need of support to undertake research as Paul Rodgers AHRC Leadership Fellow in Design 2019 states: "this next generation of researchers need encouragement and support, now more than ever." This article establishes that while there is an opportunity for practitioners, they may need additional support if they are to avoid treating participants and communities as an archive to be mined (Tuhiwai Smith 1999, 58). This article explores the perceptions and insights of a part-time textile practitioner-educator entering into this area of research: "Whether we are talking about non-exploitative methodology … or writing ethnography, we are talking about power—who has it, how it is used, for what purposes" (Wolf 1992, 133).

The Fetishization of Extant Knowledges and Cultures

The Cordillera region of the northern Philippines has a community-based weaving tradition identified as an ethnolinguistic culture which embodies language, culture, rituals, beliefs and practices. The Itneg community originated as forest dwellers from the mountains of the Cordillera and have preserved their practices through an oral culture despite periods of colonialization and relocation. Starting from the Spanish colonization, the introduction of western monetary systems, inter-community marriages and Christian churches have brought the *outside* into these once culturally and geographically isolated communities. The weavers who participated in the *Crafting Futures* programme come from communities now considered to be economically deprived, with many families living below the poverty line (Asian Development Bank 2002, 55) (Figure 1).

The *Crafting Futures* programme is seeking to support the craft traditions and autonomous life, which traditional communities such as the Itneg peoples represent. The economic and social concerns which affect the livelihoods of women living within the Cordillera region are complex (CORDITEX 2018) and the processes of capitalism and colonialism have created circumstances which have resulted in the decline of traditional community life (Asian Development Bank 2002, 27). The Cordillera is a place of natural wealth, but the region is promoted as a rich resource to foreign investors who have undertaken aggressive land development since the late nineteenth century (Singson 2014). Twenty of the poorest provinces in the Philippines are within the Cordillera region, where illiteracy and low educational attainment for women is commonplace. (Asian Development Bank 2002, 27). Commercial farming, chemical fertilizers and increased deforestation, have placed the biodiverse crops of the high wet lands (heirloom rice) and lowlands (cotton) in environmental jeopardy (Damian 2019; Glover and Stone 2018, 784; Kelly and Stephens 2019; Rodgers 2019a). Now, rare prized Philippine cotton is sold overseas before its seed has been planted (Gutierrez 2018).

The CSTFW project is exploring the livelihood and precarity of textile practices as structures which have the potential to be woven or constructed differently. While there has been a sustained impact on the intangible cultural heritages of the Cordillera (UNESCO 2012), there is evidence cited by Glover and Stone (2018, 780), that through a mix of good fortune from the point when UNESCO recognized the Ifugao Rice Terraces as "in danger" (UNESCO 2012) that a commercial fetishization process of the Cordillera and its communities has begun. Historical anti-

Figure 1
Master Weaver Catalina Ablog of Mindoro, Vigan Ilocos Sur). Photo Credit: Kelly, R. (2019).

commodities such as heirloom rice and organic Philippine cotton have switched from low to high value produce and the knowledge which arises from Cordillera weaving practices is also being identified more formally as valuable intangible cultural heritage (Acabado and Martin 2020).

The CORDITEX project from the university of the Philippines Baguio led by Professor of Social Anthropology Dr. Analyn Salvador-Amores is a significant research project exploring the mathematical and scientific structures of the Itneg weaving tradition. Tim Ingold (2011, 14) compares the anthropologist with the scientist as the differences between the *etic* which represents a neutral value free approach perspective against the *emic,* which "spells out the specific cultural meanings that people place upon it" (Ingold 2011, 14), so it is noteworthy that the CORDITEX interdisciplinary team comprises scientists, mathematicians and anthropologists and is bringing the etic and emic together. The British Council *Crafting Futures* programme promotes craft practices in an *emic* approach but there is a change emerging which is articulating the interdisciplinary nature of textile practice and textile research which favors *etic* research specifically within global traditional textile research (see Note 1). Oral traditions practiced within the Cordillera combine distinct culturally specific knowledge systems, so when textile and craft traditions are researched by outsiders and are described using scientific discourse, the patterns, structures, tools, materials and methods become fetishized (Marx 1967 [1867] in Glover and Stone 2017): "If there are any icons here, they are diagrams rather than images" (Tedlock and Tedlock 1985, 121).

Reviving the Cordillera Weaving Tradition

Periodic revivals in craft traditions have been identified by Peach (2013,163) as a recurrent feature in times of change and uncertainty (Figure 2). Anni Albers (1941)

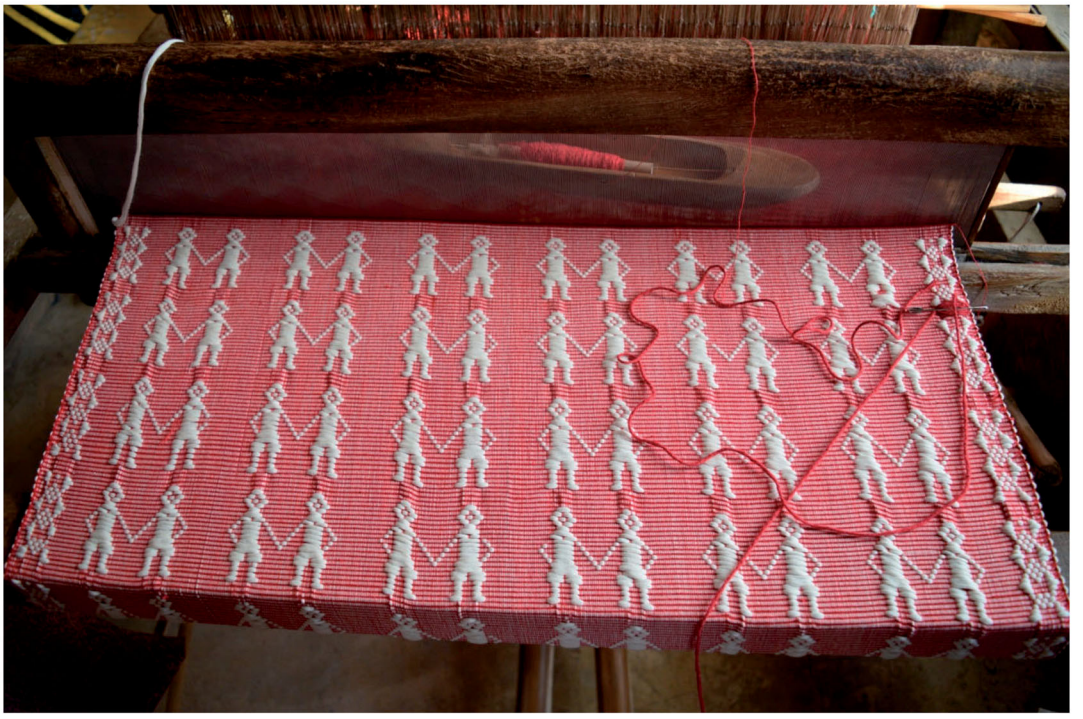

Figure 2
Adaptation of the traditional Pinilian supplementary weft method used by weavers based in Santiago, Ilocos Sur. Photo Credit: Kelly, R. (2019).

described traditional handweaving thus … "It is true that such work is often no more than a romantic attempt to recall a *temps perdu*, a result rather of an attitude than of procedure". The research undertaken by the CSTFW project (2019) identified that the diminishment of the Itneg weaving tradition is in part due to:

1. International research and study contributed to the removal of textiles, artifacts and tools from the Cordillera during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
2. The textiles that are the concern of the CORDITEX and Crafting Futures project) were woven as burial cloths and the practice of extended rituals of burial within the Cordillera have diminished over the course of the twentieth century.
3. The oral tradition of weave teaching has diminished within the Cordilleran communities since the 1950s as a result of population decline and increase in overseas Philippine worker migration.
4. To date, weaving is not taught as a core or specialist subject within Philippines elementary, secondary school or higher education, this means that community-based weaving education is practiced informally.
5. The communities who use floor looms (rather than backstrap looms) repeat the use of warp and heddle configurations with no change to patterns or structure. The knowledge of the pattern structures could be said to be held *within the loom*.

This means that when a loom is dismantled, the pattern is also dismantled.

(Adapted from the CSTFW research report by Kelly, Kettle, and Stephens (2019)

(Table 1) features reflections of weavers who participated in a *Crafting Futures* development

Table 1. Extract taken from *Creating a Sustainable Textile Future for Women* report (Kelly, Kettle, and Stephens 2019).

Being a weaver is the identity taken by these women and they demonstrate this via:
Their independence;
Their work from home;
Pride via photographs of work in the home;
Participation in education projects;
Family support structure and the connectiveness across generations;
Direct selling, costing measuring and business capability;
Peace at work—one weaver described her loom as "her office".

workshop held at the University of the Philippines Baguio. The weavers describe the act or ritual of weaving as a *habitus* (Bourdieu 2010; Grenfell 2012) meaning that weaving can enable a sense of identity in relation to community, place and within a social order. Rather than focus on the income or specific outcomes which weavers generate from their work, through workshop discussions, the weavers who participated in the project consider the benefits of weaving as being able to work independently to support their families, to work indoors during typhoons and to be able to raise their children. When women weave, they can impose an order on their lives and wellbeing and that can cease when they leave their looms.

The *Manabo* weaving community which originate as Itneg ethnolinguistic speakers, comprised at the time of writing of four elderly women who are the last remaining master weavers of this community. The Manabo weavers have traditionally produced textiles distinct in connection to traditional belief systems and land. The *Binakul* Pattern (Figure 3) is representative of traditional stories and is reproduced from memory in a form of weaving meditation. When interviewed, the weavers said that their weaving work is very difficult and tiring on both mental and physical levels, but it is noteworthy that the elderly women we met were independent, socially active and are all still working as weavers.

The *Sabangan* Weavers Association hail from the same linguistic origins as the Manabo community, but live near the sea at Mindoro, Vigan Ilocos Sur. Within this community we saw the direct affect which climate change and UN global challenges 1 (No poverty), 6 (clean water and sanitation) and 13 (climate action) (United Nations 2020) is having within such communities. The Sabangan community is at particular risk from sea erosion, and their homes were badly damaged as a result of the December 2018 typhoon. The *Sabangan* group comprise of three master weavers aged 85, 75 and 79 with an apprentice weaver aged 16, one of three young weavers we met. The apprentice is the granddaughter of Master Weaver Catalina Abalog, who learns beside her grandmother, learning through an oral teaching process (Figure 4).

There appeared to be high levels of actualizing (Maslow 1943) and a notable wellbeing amongst the weavers. While the term habitus explains a disposition to speak positively about weaving, from a humanist position (Somekh and Lewin 2011, 324) it is also possible to reflect on the power, creativity and autonomy which such women represent. While there is a strength and capability demonstrated, it must be noted again that the Itneg weavers and their communities are mostly living in economic deprivation and climate change is affecting the Philippines to an increasing extent within the lowland delta where deforestation causes landslides which affect all aspects of community work and rice farming (Gabattiss 2018; Glover and Stone 2018). The concerns of the Sabangan community of weavers from their own words, are their low income, the loss of their heritage, their inaccessibility to local weaving cotton and the effects of rising sea levels their exposure to environmental changes.

The challenges of the Cordillera have been identified to align with the UN sustainable development agenda 2030 (United Nations 2020) and the Philippines is also included in the Development Assistance Committee list for the Office for Development Assistance (OECD 2020). Theories of Change (NESTA 2011) have been developed by the *Crafting Futures* projects to support action of change to enable craft communities who are at risk of their practices and culture disappearing but who are also working in precarious circumstances. Theories of Change bring together pragmatism with epistemology (Biesta 2010, 96) and the research process starts with final aims, then works back from that point to the point of entry. Theories of Change are helpful

Figure 3
Binakul old textile sample. Photo Credit: The CORDITEX Research Archive. The University of the Philippines, Baguio.

Figure 4
A weaver's view to their garden from her typhoon ravaged home. Photo Credit: Kelly, R. (2019).

for the concrete thinking (Dalsgaard 2014, 1) which short term funded international projects require, but there is a contrast with interpretative research approaches. For practitioner researchers specifically to address the research questions which involve the problems which DAC list communities are facing as global challenges, there is an embedded complexity to the task.

Data and Discourse

American feminist anthropologist Margery Wolf describes in A Thrice Told Tale (1992) thus: "The anthropologist listens to as many voices as she can and then chooses among them when she passes their opinions on to members of another culture. The choice is not arbitrary but then neither is the testimony … " Wolf (1992, 11). There is a wealth of Cordilleran weaving history held within global museum collections, in literature from nineteenth century anthropological studies and there are testimonies of this culture being celebrated and valued by research projects today. But what benefits have the communities ever gained from this? In ethnographic research, as in textile community practice and teaching, it seems that often more is learnt more about yourself than the context of the subjects/participants you are working with. So when working directly with weavers and their communities, auto-ethnographic methods are helpful for the researcher to understand their position in relation to research participants. If presented honestly in addition to the weaving information gathered, the qualitative data collected also included: *Phone calls and text messages to families and children; bitten finger nails; incorrect clothing; lack of money; nausea, sleeplessness, worry, heat and fear.* The difference between a researcher's self-reflection is that through the economies of research, such reflections become experiential capital. But for the participants more often than not, nothing changes as a result.

Reflection on Photograph- Leaving our homestay at 2am to travel to Abra. (Image Rachel Kelly) this image illustrates the reality of our visit which

Figure 5
Image from Crafting Futures Evaluation Report. Photo Credit: Kelly, R. (2019).

meant that we (Kelly & Stephens) had much less sleep than we would normally survive on. The lack of sleep, dangers of travelling at night and tiredness on arrival to visit the communities provided an 'edge' from which to reflect. Our instincts were both sharpened and impaired during the project, making the experience deeply memorable. Every aspect of what we did, how we travelled enabled us to connect to the project, this place of weaving in the land of the Cordillera in the Philippines (Figure 5).

Looking back at notes taken at the time, it was in the *experience* of this project where insights emerged which enabled the research questions to be addressed. A great part of understanding from this project came from an emerging textile identity (habitus) which comes from practice, but which places women textile workers in liminality within structures which prohibit development or growth. Similar to a teaching tutorial, when it is often difficult to capture fully at the time the reflection-in action moment (Schön 1987), praxis becomes an outcome of action through face-to-face conversations, sharing materials, stories and through solidarity. Within the *Crafting Futures* project, such situations or events would not be happening, had the project not taken place. Situated experiences play an important role when they become recognizable and identified by others (Lave and Wenger 1991; Koro-Ljungberg, MacLure, and Ulmer 2018, 809 in Denzin and Lincoln 2018). Interactions as research opportunities, serve a purpose beyond a project's boundaries specifically when they are translated as fuel for education praxis. First-time practitioner-researchers who are engaging in projects such as *Crafting Futures* can be described as being susceptible to absorb the research experience as fully as they can (Shreeve, 2011), so within this first-time international research experience, everything stuck, was remembered and was documented. It is through a retrospective carding process that the richness of the experience can be evaluated and tested through discourse analysis methods. The rawness of the researcher then becomes a form of potential research in itself and this potential is perhaps

Figure 6
A weaver's paradise garden. Photo Credit: Kelly, R. (2019).

what Rodgers (2019b, 1) claims as "the necessary" within Design research today (Figure 6).

Discourse analysis methods enabled the research questions to be explored through reflective interpretation of the data (Lee in Lee and Poynton 2000, 188 and in Somekh and Lewin, 2011, 140). The data available for analysis within the *Crafting Futures* project varied from semi-structured interview notes and workshop reflections, but it was the documentary photographs taken by the project photographer which became essential documents of the research as discourse. In analyzing the photographs taken on return from the Philippines, the memories of the weaving workshops in the Cordillera got mixed with recollections and images from personal working experiences. Images can become entangled through reflective practice and layered like a palimpsest where past memories becomes visible within a present image or surface (Ingold 2020). Weaver Catalina Abalog's garden became a recurring memory or palimpsest where the experience at the time, which was representative of a paradise, was contrasting with questions around the circumstances of the weaver. The home of the weaver embodied an idea of perfection, if perfection is to be a woman doing work she feels proud of and working with independence, agency and autonomy: "To work in your own home, with your hands on your own loom, making textiles which affirm your sense of self at a deep level … and to have a small garden in which from dry ground is emerging some healthy looking pak choi" (From the author's reflective project notes).

The CSTFW project used ethnographic methodology as a research process which can be guided by "uncertainty and contradictions … open-endedness and the open mind" Frankham and Edwards-Kerr (2009) in Somekh and Lewin (2011, 34). It also involved reflections on the research which involved data collected, but to be reflected on afterwards. Within a context where a white European researcher is traveling to

~~Concerns for the Sabangan women are their very low income.~~

(The Sabangan women work independently and survive on what they earn from their weaving)

~~Wellbeing comes from the act or ritual of weaving rather than the income generated.~~

(Weaving is an active practice, it is physical, repetitive and time consuming).

~~Being a weaver is the identity taken by these women and they demonstrated this via:~~

(Weaving is one of a range of work types available to these women, alternatives include egg selling, prostitution and factory work) demonstrated via:

- ~~Their independence;~~ Their Dependence;
- ~~Their work from home;~~ Their home is their place of work;
- ~~Pride via photographs of work in the home.~~ There are only pictures of their work;
- ~~Participation in education projects;~~ It is useful for education projects to use examples such as these women as data;
- ~~Family support structure and the connectiveness across generations;~~ Ties that bind;
- ~~Direct selling;~~ No one to support the sale of work;

~~Peace at work – one weaver described her loom as 'her office'.~~

Life is so challenging in terms of poverty that the sanctuary of work brings a sense of relief.

Figure 7
Text reversal process undertaken by the author. Photo Credit: Kelly, R. (2019).

the opposite side of the globe, the questions we ask and methods we use can become more important than the answers we seek (Wolf (1992, 5). A discourse analysis method which uses a text reversal process (Threadgold in Lee and Poynton 2000, 48) enabled alternative or different facing perspectives like a warp and weft to emerge:

(The Sabangan women work independently and survive on what they earn from their weaving)

(Weaving is an active practice, it is physical, repetitive and time consuming).

(Weaving is one of a range of work types available to these women, alternatives include egg selling, prostitution and factory work) demonstrated via:

Their Dependence;

Their home is their place of work;

There are only pictures of their work;

It is useful for education projects to use examples such as these women as data;

Ties that bind;

No one to support the sale of work;

Life is so challenging in terms of poverty that the sanctuary of work brings a sense of relief.

Bourdieu's theory of practice helps to clarify further, the opposing dispositions which this project presented:

$$(\text{Habitus})\ (\text{Capital}) + \text{Field} = \text{Practice}.$$

(Bourdieu 1977, 101 in Thatcher et al. 2015, 8–10).

Habitus describes the role of textile practice and the identity of women textile workers who draw strength from their independence and autonomy. The weft of the project involves the *capital* of the participant, be it economic, social or intangibly cultural. The floating supplementary weft threads which are a characteristic of Cordilleran weaving can be visualized as the *field* and context of *Crafting Futures* as a concern which connects the Itneg weavers to a global community of craft

Figure 8
Pinilian Horse Pattern: Learning tool-kit 'new' woven sample created by Dr Michelle Stephens. Photo Credit: Stephens, M. (2019).

practice. The resulting outcome is the capacity for a community of shared understanding to emerge as textile *practice*, which within such a globally disconnected context may seem strange to describe as also feeling at times, inseparable and connected.

Conclusion

The practical and supportive outcomes of the CSTFW project provided twenty-two small portable looms which aimed to recreate the portability of the traditional Cordillera backstrap loom. The backstrap loom is a sustainable alternative to be considered by the Itneg community who have for various aforementioned reasons, broken down or reallocated their frame looms and are to a certain extent, needing to learn again. A weave learning tool-kit in the form of a booklet which includes weaving drafts, drafting information and drafted textile study samples was provided as a practical outcome of the CSTFW project. The University of the Philippines Baguio team will use the weaving drafts developed to generate Itneg weaving patterns using a digital loom. In the future and it is hoped that master weavers, younger community members and students from the University of the Philippines will be able to work together in a new

form of tradition, to produce digital reproductions of their patterns and develop new, yet culturally intangible weaving traditions.

The grip which Bourdieu's Theory of Practice provides is vital to reflect on if marginalized women workers are to challenge and seek improvements in their livelihoods. Itneg practices will remain unsustainable unless economic outcomes or values of master craft practices are heightened through the shared knowledge and the craft activism which programmes such as *Crafting Futures* create. It is through respectful useful collaborations with outsiders, and in preservation of traditional intellectual property rights where, this work can commence in earnest. Within textile practice and education, there is often a tolerance *in*, rather than a construction *of* the structures in which we are held. The manner in which the weavers in the Cordillera tolerate aspects of their situations may seem to over simplify things (Stronach and Maclure 1997, 5; Atkinson 2003), but their tolerance gives power those who will continue until their breaking point occurs:

The critical point is that both sides of the coin of global cultural process today are products of the infinitely varied mutual contest of sameness and difference on a stage characterized by radical disjunctures between different sorts of global flows and the uncertain landscapes created in and through these disjunctures. (Appadurai 1990, 308)

Local, community and ground level craft praxis is required to balance out western orientated research paradigms and the colonial baggage we bring. The Mi'kmaw concept of Two-Eyed seeing is a term attributed to Elder Albert Marshall (Peltier 2018) and is a term which serves to synthesize indigenous methodology with western research methods. While a Two-Eyed seeing approach may enable community centered knowledges to be brought into focus, it is likely that Two Eyed seeing 'will be congruent with decolonizing approaches to research and founded in Indigenous knowledges, methodologies, and ways of knowing (Kovach, 2009 in Wright et al. 2019, 16). Projects such as *Crafting Futures* paired with an openness to reflective auto-ethnographic methodologies enable a layering and palimpsest which comprises of experiences across different textile contexts to be created. Such textile envisions are vital to describe and discuss through research dissemination if we are to address some of the wider questions this article raises. The reflexive textile practitioner-educator within opportunities such as *Crafting Futures* projects can make the jump from the project context to their UK Higher Education teaching practice, to create awareness and stimulate change. However, it is with regret that like Margery Wolf I am also left asking myself: "Am I appropriating the collective experience of people [from Peihoten] for my own purposes, for my personal career needs? Yes, I suppose this is true" Wolf (1992, 123).

Note

1. For an example of scientific and mathematical studies of Andean weaving traditions see: [online] [https://www.bbk.ac.uk/downloads/research/ref-impact-case-study-modern-languages-and-linguistics-andean-textiles-and-recovering-traditional-crafts.pdf]

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