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# The International Folk Art Market: Cultural Commodification in the Global Marketplace

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## Introduction

While art is bought and sold constantly, the International Folk Art Market (IFAM) provides a unique vantage point for investigating the impact that the sale of cultural items has on communities around the world. IFAM is a non-profit organization that coordinates the annual IFAM events in Santa Fe, Dallas, and Arlington. IFAM is the largest international folk art market in the world, and its success has caused Santa Fe to become the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) ‘City of Folk Art’ (IFAM, Home Page). The Market’s 2017 Impact Report indicates that more than \$3.1 million was generated by 154 artists from 53 countries in just 2.5 days (International Folk Art Alliance 2017). The Market invites any international artist whose artwork meets the requirements of traditional folk art, as determined by IFAM’s Selection and Placement Committees, to attend and sell their goods. Folk art sold at the Market includes, but is not limited to, textiles, jewelry, ceramics, rugs, and two-dimensional art. The Market has had a remarkable international impact and successful growth over fifteen years.

This paper considers what implications the Market’s goals have for the various Market participants. IFAM articulates its mission and vision:

The mission of the International Folk Art Market is to create economic opportunities for and with folk artists worldwide who celebrate and preserve folk art traditions. The International Folk Art Market envisions a world that values the dignity and humanity of the handmade, honors timeless cultural traditions, and supports the work of folk artists serving as entrepreneurs and catalysts for positive social change. (IFAM, Home Page)

This mission statement indicates the market’s commitment to social innovation as a means of development, thus supporting the continuation of folk art traditions through the creation of a market. Chief Executive Officer of IFAM, Jeff Snell, has said social innovation at the Market “[focuses] on solving social problems at their root cause, a pivot away from traditional charity’s

model of managing problems” (Snell 2015). Snell expresses the Market’s intention in solving rather than managing problems, presumably in countries that are considered to be in the “developing world.” One place this intention can be seen is in the Mentor to Market program, which aims to “provide business and marketing workshops, hands-on skill building, peer-to-peer learning, and long-term support for folk artists to help them improve their livelihoods and participate more effectively in the global marketplace” (IFAM, Artist Training). IFAM advertises its impact on communities around the world as this program has been offered to 930 artists and their representatives since its inception. The IFAM strives to bring greater international attention to folk art traditions at the well-attended Santa Fe Market and to train artists in business development to strengthen their companies. My research considers two main questions: 1) how does art function as both a means of supporting artists and expanding the market for artisan goods, and 2) how might various cultural groups be susceptible to cultural commodification through the buying and selling of cultural items. My research will investigate the IFAM programs to explore the perceptions and implications of the sale of cultural items and artwork in the United States.

## **Methods**

In order to gain a better understanding of how various stakeholders at the Market view cultural commodification, my research included interviews with Market staff, board members, consumers, and artists. Interviews were semi-structured and audio recorded when granted affirmative consent by interviewees. Each interview was conducted one-on-one, either in-person, on the phone, or via Skype. The focus of each interview varied based on the individual’s relationship to the Market. Themes of interviews included: perception of the goals of IFAM,

individual motivations for involvement in the Market, and the impact that the Market has on the individual and their community. Each interviewee was asked what level of confidentiality they wished to have in the final report. Their requests are respected in this paper. IRB approval was granted prior to the start of this research.

In addition to these semi-structured interviews, I engaged in participant observation at various IFAM sponsored events: the Folk Art Matters lecture series, the opening community celebration, the One World Awards Dinner, the Friday Market Opening Party, and the Saturday Market. Because I conducted this research during Market season, many of the staff, board, and artists had limited availability to sit down for formal interviews, however I was able to glean important information from informal conversations. I obtained additional information about IFAM artists through their websites, news sources, and other interviews published online. These sources provided helpful information regarding the missions and values of artists' companies, as well as the community impact of their artwork.

### **Defining Folk Art and Commodification**

Central to IFAM's mission is the promotion of traditional folk art as a means for positive social change. IFAM defines folk art as "an expression of the world's traditional cultures.... made by individuals whose creative skills convey their community's authentic cultural identity, rather than an individual or idiosyncratic artistic identity" (IFAM, What is Folk Art). This definition differentiates folk art from 'art,' which, generally speaking, doesn't seek to represent a collective cultural identity. Instead, folk art is uniquely classified as the cultural property of a group and is included in UNESCO's definition of intangible cultural property: "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and

cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (UNESCO 2003). This cultural property continues to be an important aspect of identity. In considering this relationship between cultural objects and identity, David A. Napier (1997) writes “the loss of cultural wealth is frequently accompanied both by social disintegration and by a rhetorical paralysis” (Napier 1997: 166). Napier sees this cultural wealth and identity as directly tied to cultural continuity in an increasingly globalized world. This quote reflects UNESCO’s notion that cultural property is a valuable component of cultural identity, a distinction that differentiates it from other forms of art.

Folk art is commodified as it is given economic value within the international marketplace. Ajani (2012) speaks about this commodification: “elements which were previously integrated into the fabric of society before the rise of capitalism now become subject increasingly to the laws of the marketplace” (Ajani 2012: 114). This integration of items historically exempt from the economic system is made clear in an interview with an artist representative of one group involved with IFAM. They noted that through the international consumer, weaved goods were given new economic value:

The other benefit is that it [the international clientele] adds value to the textiles so weaving was basically thought of something that people did in the home. It wasn’t a paid activity...But it didn’t have any kind of economic or monetary value so... there’s kind of no customers if it is all local because everybody weaves. So by adding in the international aspect it adds an economic value to weaving. Or it makes them worth something and makes the weavers able to earn an income. (Artist Representative, June 17, 2018)

This illustrates how within the international market, cultural items may be commodified and assigned increased economic value through their circulation far from the place and context of production. This representative noted that their company is largely reliant upon international

consumers and visitors to their workshop, and estimated that local visitors and consumers made up only about 10 percent of their consumer base. The reliance on international consumers has allowed weavers in this area to make a profit off of goods which were previously only for domestic and community consumption.

One IFAM board member who was interviewed presented a different understanding of commodification:

I don't necessarily think that the sale of some product that has inherent cultural, intangible value, or tangible even, necessarily represents a commoditized product. I think that that heavily relies on economies of scale and whether or not there is reinvestment into a cultural practice. (Board Member, June 29, 2018)

For this individual, whether or not a product was commoditized was determined by the impact that the sale of the item had on the artist. However, for the purposes of this research, I define commodification as the process by which an item, which may have previously been exempt from the market, enters the economic system and is valued as a commodity.

As more goods are being brought into the neoliberal market, culture becomes a resource which can be used for economic and social gain. Yúdice (2003) argues that culture is now valued for its ability to improve social, political, and economic problems. This is a move away from a more traditional view of culture where its value was rooted in art, symbolic value, and skill. This shift towards the idea of culture as a resource is exemplified as he writes that culture is, “no longer experienced, valued, or understood as transcendent” (12). Instead, culture is very much a part of social and economic systems, and can be used as a resource for socio-economic gain. Furthermore, Yúdice writes, “representations of and claims to cultural difference are expedient insofar as they multiply commodities and empower community” (25). This theory relates shifts towards neoliberalism, corresponding with globalization, to a rising emphasis on culture as a

resource (28). Michael Brown (2003) similarly writes “The market’s restless search for novelty turned unfamiliar folktales, art, and music into exploitable commercial resources” (2003: 4). This resource is increasingly available to the international market through cultural commodification. Therefore, through branded difference within the market, cultural difference can be utilized for economic and socio-political gain.

Mary Coffey’s work, “Great Masters of Mexican Folk Art in Los Angeles,” provides an example of Yúdice’s theory of cultural expediency within the Market. The Great Masters of Mexican Folk Art is an exhibition through the Fomento Cultural Banamex’s Folk Art Support Program which highlights the work of Mexican folk artists and emphasizes the importance of the marketplace in ensuring the continuation of cultural crafts. The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles collaborated with Mervyn’s, a local supermarket with a large Latinx consumer base, for the exhibit. Mervyn’s advertised the exhibit and provided funding. This benefited Mervyn’s as they were able to show their commitment to the local diasporic community. Additionally, the museum benefitted from a larger audience to the exhibit. Coffey sums up this exchange as she writes: “Mervyn’s La Plaza celebration reflects precisely the marriage of corporate interest and community enhancement that the privatization of culture has wrought” (Coffey 2018: 210). She argues that the exhibit reflects Yúdice’s theory insofar as the, “Great Masters ability to multiply commodities and empower community – is not unique to this exhibition, but rather the very condition of the cultural logic of expediency” (Coffey 2018: 211). This example, tied to Yúdice’s theory, presents the idea that cultural commodification represents a shift in the role of culture as a resource within a capitalist market. But it is important to consider, does this shift create winners and losers? And, what is at stake in this transformation of culture into commodities?

## Investigating Positionality

Through this research project, I sought to gain a better understanding of how those involved with the Market viewed their own positionality within the cultural transmission at the Market. To do so, I asked Market staff, board, and customers if their involvement with the Market had any impact on the way they thought about their own culture or ethnicity. The majority of those I asked replied that it had not. Their responses ranged from quick nos to longer pauses, seeming to indicate that they had not considered their culture within the context of the Market. One staff member responded:

I'm American and other than that I'm kind of just a melting pot of western Europe so I don't actually have that much passion about my own culture, which is interesting I think. I guess it has made me wish I knew more about my ancestry and maybe had more cultural traditions in my family. (IFAM Staff, June 26, 2018).

Their response reflects the idea that American culture is often perceived to be a blank slate, an unmarked category, whereas artisans' "ethnic" culture is perceived as being rich with culture. These responses, from IFAM staff, board members, and customers, differed greatly from those of artists. Many artists spoke to how their involvement with the Market had strengthened their sense of cultural identity. Various interviewees, including artists, staff, and board members, discussed how IFAM has elevated the social status of artisans. As previously discussed, artists are largely hailed as celebrities at the Market and have the chance to experience being a part of a global community of skilled artisans. One artist representative noted that by having the opportunity for weavers to go to the Market in Santa Fe, "it helps even more to elevate the status of the weavers... instead of it just being this thing that you do in their spare time at home, you can earn an income and you can travel and you can be a part of this whole international artisan

community... it makes them even more respected for what they do” (Artist Representative). Additionally, the Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco’s website reads that, “before indigenous people were ashamed of their identity and traditions, they are now proud of their textiles, proud of their community, and most importantly, proud of themselves” (CTTC, Our History). Through the sale of traditional goods, the Quechuan weavers were able to reclaim their ethnic identity as a source of pride. This is not unique to CTTC, many artists have expressed how the Market has had a positive impact of the way they think about their own cultures.

The differences in responses between the artists and the IFAM staff, board members, and customers warrants the questions: Where is culture located? And who experiences it? In considering relevant social forces, it is essential to consider the fact that folk art is an “expression of the world’s traditional cultures” (IFAM, What is Folk Art). When I asked staff and board members what qualifies as a traditional culture, many had to pause and struggled to find the words to explain. One staff member, who provided the clearest answer, said:

Ancestry is a good place to start... if it has been passed down from generation to generation, that is usually a hint that it is folk art. But there are also a lot of artists that have revived their tradition. Their family weren’t artists but they learned maybe in school about a certain type of art that used to be done in their country and they decided to learn how to do that and to perfect it and revive it. So that counts too....it is also about having a cultural relevance for them and so if that it is part of something ceremonial or part of something spiritual or part of something just generally cultural then that artwork, or the creation of that artwork, fits in that category. (IFAM staff member, June 26, 2018)

I found that artists had clearer answers of what traditional culture meant to them. One artist defined traditional cultures as:

Traditional culture is culture that is generational and passed down. It is respected and honored by those who learn the tradition. It is developed over a long period of time, developed from the environmental, cultural and societal influences, and although tradition sounds static, it is somehow constantly evolving. Traditional

culture is different from other cultures because it represents the culture of a group of people and has been honoured, surviving through time. (Artist, July 10, 2018).

While both staff and artists talk about folk art as art which is passed down over generations, the artisans emphasize the idea of honor and respect for the culture and the art form as a crucial part of the reproduction of craft. These traditional cultures are often located in areas of the world that were colonized by the West and are now often identified as part of the Global South. Colonialism, imperialism, and postcolonialism continue to impact the ways in which individuals interact within the world and within the market. Hart expresses this sentiment as he writes, “the history of colonialism bears significantly on the making of someone else’s culture into property in a world that calls itself postcolonial” (1997: 137). Discourse rooted in colonialism also contributes to the idea that Western modernity is culture-less, while those who aren’t included in this Western modernity are often overdetermined by their cultures. Pletsch (1981) argues that the world has historically been viewed in binary, as divided between “traditional” and “modern” (Pletsch 1981: 573). He argues that the modern world is understood as “technologically advanced, but ideologically ambiguous” whereas the “Third World” is “underdeveloped economically and technologically, with traditional mentality obscuring access to science and utilitarian thinking” (Pletsch 1981: 578). Pletsch’s insight highlights how culture is often located in the Global South while the Global North is understood to be culture-less, instead, rooted in enlightenment ideals of science and reason. This helps to make sense of the differing responses from artists and from IFAM staff, board members, and customers. Their responses indicate a sense of culture being located in the Global South, rather than something experienced in the West. While the Market in Santa Fe does host folk artists under the category of “Europe and Eurasia,” much of the attention on traditional folk art is placed on indigenous peoples and those

from the Global South. If culture and tradition live in the Global South and the Global North sees itself as culture-less, how do we understand the consumption of traditional culture by affluent citizens of the north? Does it convey the kind of honor and respect described by artisans or does the act or purchase devoid it of symbolic value and transform it into a purely economic commodity? Or, alternately, does the purchase communicate a desire to appropriate that culture as personal property in a context where culture is perceived to be lacking? To begin to answer these questions, a consideration of the Market, which acts as the space of this transaction, is essential.

### **Performance of Difference at the International Folk Art Market**

The Market officially begins with the Friday Night Opening Party, tickets cost \$225 per person, so it draws an enthusiastic and wealthy folk art crowd. Artists are busy Friday afternoon setting up their booths and preparing for the opening. During the setup of all these booths, some artists wear traditional clothing, while many others are dressed in jeans and t-shirts and blend into the Market crowd. This similarity in clothing quickly changes as the Market begins and all of the artists change into their traditional clothing for a group photo. This performance of difference is widely celebrated by the guests of the Market who comment on the beauty of the artists' clothing. One board member commented on how seeing the artists in "native costumes" is part of what makes the Market so attractive for visitors.

In the case of the International Folk Art Market, artists are celebrated for their traditional crafts. President of the Crafts Council of India, Ashoke Chatterjee, in *The Work of Art*, even goes so far as to say, "At Santa Fe, the artisans are VIPs. They are truly the center of everything, not as mere beneficiaries but as celebrities" (Padilla et al. 2013, 12). In many ways, these artists

experience acceptance by the dominant Western culture because of their deemed authenticity- as determined by IFAM staff. However, in small moments throughout the Market, I observed consumers dissatisfaction with artists when they show their relation to modernity and westernization. For example, when a popular artist was seen smoking by the port-a-potties along the perimeter of the large market, this act sparked whispers among some visitors who seemed to find this action to be inappropriate. I understood their reaction as a response to the artist's divergence from their idea of artist authenticity which is equated with virtuosity. The illusion of the artist's pristineness was sullied by the smoking which is seen as something dirty, a vice.

One staff member expressed some hesitations regarding the encouraged performance of culture at the Market:

I do worry that showing them [the artists] in a certain way at the Market might encourage ideas... maybe stereotypes that a lot of Westerners feel about individuals from developing countries. Might not be as sophisticated or intelligent as business people and I don't think that's the case... I think overall, most Western people would be really surprised at how sophisticated the artists are and its important to show that sophistication in some way and I do worry that consumers will leave sort of with the wrong impression. And for me, when I think about craft economy, I think a big stereotype is that craft is done by some quaint woman in some quaint village there. And that they are over there and we are over here and that by purchasing from them and working with them and donating towards this cause, we are helping them (IFAM staff member).

This quote reflects the concern that many Westerners associate those who sell cultural items with stereotypes of rural individuals in the 'developing world.' This staff member expressed a desire for the Market to focus more on ways to combat stereotypical ideas of artists. However, this performance of culture is deeply nuanced, and the benefits may outweigh the negative implications for the artists.

Literature which considers the search for authenticity among cultural groups helps to explain why this performance of difference at the Market is so attractive for visitors. The location of culture in the Global South emerged in the late 20th century as formalized colonialism came to an end and cultural groups in the Global South continued to be ‘ethnicized’ by colonizers and were asked to be ‘traditional’ (Comaroff 2009). Renato Rosaldo (1989) notes how this colonial legacy has created what he calls imperialist nostalgia, defined as: “nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed” (Rosaldo 1989: 108). Nostalgia is reflected in the colonizers’ emphasis on progress and modernity within their own society which is denied from the colonized. However, through a paternal and romantic view of the colonized (associated with the primitive), the colonizer “makes racial domination appear innocent and pure in their actions” (Rosaldo 1989: 107). This social legacy of colonialism continues to have an impact on the way individuals in the Global North view those in the Global South, often through an anachronistic, romantic lens. This perspective leads to an emphasis on ‘authentic’ traditional peoples, those who are seemingly untouched by westernization and modernity, as a signifier of their value to the West.

This search for cultural authenticity among many Western consumers, impacts how artists are able to interact within the international market. For example, in his research on voluntourism Kontogeorgopoulos notes that many volunteer tourists in Thailand cite object authenticity, defined by him as “the authenticity of toured objects, people, and settings,” as a key reason for engaging in this type of tourism (Kontogeorgopoulos 2016: 1). Individuals who are native to the visited country are often judged by tourists who are seeking a ‘real’ tourism experience. The tourist, then, determines their authenticity by whether or not these people fit the

expectations and stereotypes that tourists hold (Kontogeorgopoulos 2016: 7). Furthermore, Kontogeorgopoulos notes that, “there is a discernible feeling among most volunteer tourists that ‘real’ Thais are rural, traditional, and simple in their aspirations and values”(Kontogeorgopoulos 2016: 8). The idea of Thai culture, rooted in colonialism and racism, perpetuates the idea that Thai’s are opposed to modernity and that an authentic Thai is inherently rural (Dayley 2011). Similarly, Vodopivec and Jaffe (2011) write that, “authentic Others are found only when they are not contaminated by Western ideas and lifestyles: when they are rural, underdeveloped and poor” (124). Clearly, these understandings are rooted in the colonial idea of the ‘primitive’ Other.

This anachronistic understanding of people from ‘traditional’ cultures creates a sense of the Other which is utilized for profit within the system of capitalism. In some ways, this otherness is branded through the sale of traditional folk art. Yúdice (2003) writes: “to the degree that globalization brings different cultures into contact with each other, it escalates the questioning of norms and thus abets performativity” (Yúdice 2003: 31). In other words, globalization brings cultures together which means that ‘traditionality’ largely becomes a performance within this space. In noting this performativity within the capitalist system, Jonathan Rutherford (1990) argues that advertising campaigns throughout the West emphasized the importance of individuality and uniqueness and that within the capitalist system, “Otherness is sought after for its exchange value, its exoticism and the pleasures, thrills and adventures it can offer” (Rutherford 1990: 11). Similarly, bell hooks (1992) argues that “within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (hooks 1992: 21). She elaborates on the downfalls of capitalism in the West as she writes:

Masses of young people dissatisfied by U.S. imperialism, unemployment, lack of economic opportunity, afflicted by the postmodern malaise of alienation, no sense of grounding, no redemptive identity, can be manipulated by cultural strategies that offer Otherness as appeasement, particularly through commodification. The contemporary crisis of identity in the west, especially as experienced by white youth, are eased when the 'primitive' is recouped *via* a focus on diversity and pluralism which suggests the Other can provide life-sustaining alternatives. Concurrently, diverse ethnic/racial groups can also embrace this sense of specialness, that histories and experiences once seen as worthy only of disdain can be looked upon with awe. (hooks 1992: 25)

In summary, the West look to traditional cultures for alternatives to neoliberal economic development, identifying it based on colonial images of who and what counts as having authentic culture. In consuming it through appropriation of others' cultures, those cultures that present themselves as especially authentic because of their difference from the West become particularly appealing. Deborah Root (1996) recognizes this emphasis on difference in the West: "It is possible to consume somebody's spirit, somebody's past or history, or somebody's arts... The sites where this consumption takes place can be some of the most cherished institutions in Western culture: art galleries, libraries, museums, universities" (Root 1996: 18). This emphasis on the authentic Other reflects Rosaldo's notion of the imperialist nostalgia, whereby Westerners long for what, historically, they have destroyed (Rosaldo 1989). Because of histories of colonialism and the largely capitalist world, 'traditional' cultures are often performed in the international market to satisfy the Western consumer's imperialist nostalgia.

### **Economics of Cultural Commodification**

Interviews with artists indicated that cultural commodification within the global marketplace has provided agency and economic opportunities for them. One example of this is in the work of a Kenyan Samburu woman, Rebecca Lolosoli, who is discussed in *The Work of Art*, a book published by the International Folk Art Alliance in conjunction with IFAM. She

participated in an Entrepreneurs in Handcrafts workshop, put on by Vital Voices (a non-profit which focuses on supporting women for economic independence), and began to advocate for women who experienced violence in her village and for those women that were raped by British soldiers (Umoja Women, Rebecca Lolosoli Trails). Her stance against the physical abuse of women made her in danger of attack. Lolosoli eventually left her village to found the women-only village of Umoja Uaso. This village is sustained through the sale of traditional Samburu beaded jewelry and through the village's advertisement as a tourist location. In speaking about the sale of beadwork Lolosoli has said: "We decided to do a small business, selling our jewelry on the road. When tourists are passing we welcome them, and they buy our things when we are here....This is what we depend on. This is our living." ("The Land of No Men" 2015). The women's artwork rose in recognition through its sale at the International Folk Art Market. Further, in 2010 it was featured in the spring collection of fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg (Padilla et al. 2013: 58-61). Lolosoli's involvement with the global market had tangible benefits for the women leading Umoja Uaso. This case study, reflecting the positive impact that cultural commodification can have, is one example of many presented in the advertising materials of IFAM. It is, however, important to consider how unequal power relations in the international economy, rooted in colonialism, may inform what kinds of access individuals in the Global South have to participation.

For many countries in the Global South, their historically weaker economies cannot compete with the cheap influx of manufactured goods from the Global North. This economic disadvantage, produced through colonialism, has led to a reliance on cultural commodification and its sale in the Global North for many of these countries in the Global South. This reliance on

cultural commodification should come as no surprise as the social legacies of colonialism —the differentiation between the West as culture-less and the Global South as the home of authentic, traditional culture— remains (Pletsch 1981). Then, it makes sense that the Global South would use culture as a resource, its comparative advantage, within a globalized economy (Yúdice 2003).

In addition to the use of culture as a comparative advantage in the Global South, the sale of folk art, as one piece of the craft economy, may be at the foundation of developing economies.

One IFAM board member said:

I think that developing economies will always have a reliance on craft economy because the craft economy, in my estimation, is the most resilient part of any form of economic production. Even in the most war torn places on the planet, there will always be a reason to do or create something that is based on an ancestral tradition in order to kind of reemerge or defend its own vulnerability. And so it's actually at its most vulnerable economies by definition that are in the Global South, rely on craft economy... So if you look at creative and craft economy in the world in world production, it's about five percent of global GDP. But if you look at it in relation to developing nations it is much higher, sometimes reaching 10, 15, maybe even 20 percent. (Board Member)

This quote illustrates that a reliance on craft is central to more vulnerable economies. This applies to the Market as an article by IFAM says: “Many of the artists come from developing countries where the average income is less than \$3.10 a day, and where political, social, and environmental hardships can make everyday life—not to mention the creation of art—challenging” (IFAM, “Donna Karan and Urban Zen Foundation to Sponsor the IFAM ‘Wear Your Impact’ Initiative”). In conjunction with the frequent location of ‘traditional,’ ‘authentic’ cultures in the Global South, cultural commodification becomes a promising opportunity for economic growth.

This year, IFAM launched a “Wear Your Impact Initiative” which “encourages people to purchase clothing and accessories that support international artists, preserve their creative cultures, and reach their home communities with income and positive change” (IFAM, “Donna Karan and Urban Zen Foundation to Sponsor the IFAM ‘Wear Your Impact’ Initiative”). This initiative reflects themes of ethical consumption from my interviews with IFAM staff, board members, and customers. Many of them expressed concern about the availability of cheaply, mass produced goods within the globalized economy. Consumers, board members, and staff expressed that IFAM felt like an alternative to capitalism. One consumer, and frequent visitor to the Market said, “There is no heart and soul in big retail. Perhaps, that is why the Market artists bring a uniqueness to the marketplace that many people still crave as we continue to lose more and more of ourselves to big retail and the likes of Amazon, Apple, etc” (IFAM Consumer). Similarly, another consumer made a comparison between folk art purchases from IFAM and other purchases they had recently made: “It’s sort of like the difference between a sweater that your grandmother knitted versus a similar one from Nordstrom” (IFAM Consumer). Additionally, a staff member noted that “The folk art market is almost like an opposite to the negatives of capitalism” (IFAM Staff Member). These quotes reflect a desire for social connection within the economy, something which the Market provides. Artists also feel these economic and social pressures tied to globalization. Artists at the Market have spoken about how many people in their communities are buying goods that are more cheaply produced, and that are not made through traditional methods. Through IFAM, and its emphasis on high-quality, handmade folk art, many artists are able to continue to produce their traditional craft.

### **Questions of Appropriation**

While the “Wear Your Impact” initiative may have many positive impacts on artists and may be appealing to the Market consumer, it also raises questions regarding cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation, defined by Ziff and Rao (1997) is “the taking - from a culture that is not one’s own- of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge” (Ziff and Rao 1997: 1). Unequal power dynamics between cultural groups impacts cultural transmission. For Ziff and Rao, this transmission can be appropriative in nature when a dominant group determines when, where, and how, they might borrow cultural goods associated with subordinate groups (Ziff and Rao 7). Root (1996) notes that this appropriation of cultural items has foundations in colonialism: “within Western aesthetics other cultural traditions have been assigned the role of artistic resource, to be harvested pretty much at the pleasure of the colonizers... although the specifics of this appropriation have shifted over time” (Root 1996: 19). This legacy continues today, as dominant cultural groups experience privilege in choosing which aspects of another culture to appropriate, be it for fun, fashion, decoration, etc. In contrast, less dominant groups often feel pressure to adopt elements of the dominant culture in order to be accepted. One popular example of this is in black hairstyles. Many black women have been required to alter their natural hair or to remove hair styles such as cornrows in order to be deemed professional in the workplace. Then, when someone of a more dominant group, uses cornrows as a fashion statement, they are often praised for it. This cultural transmission reflects how imbalances in power continue to negatively impact less dominant cultural groups. These power dynamics are important to consider within the context of the Market. IFAM board and staff members describe the consumer demographic at the Market as

largely wealthy, white, educated, women around the age of sixty. The characteristics of wealthy, white, and educated all indicate markers of the dominant cultural class.

bell hooks (1992) similarly points to the problems with this cultural transmission as she describes cultural appropriation as the commodification of difference which allows for a “consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other’s history through a process of decontextualization” (hooks 1992: 31). For her, the unequal power inherent in the relationship between dominant and less dominant cultures continues to oppress the subordinate by stripping historical context from the exchange. Root (1996) highlights how cultural commodification often elicits an apolitical response, an effect of the decontextualization of the Other’s history. Many people admire cultural items from different regions and use them within their own decor and fashion, yet they have little involvement when it comes to questioning the economic and political policies of the West which continue to impact the countries where the cultural items originated (Root 1996: 25). These works reflect how the global imbalance of power, rooted in colonialism, continue to impact cultural commodification.

The question of whether or not folk art is susceptible to appropriation must also consider value chain equity. The concept of the value chain, introduced by Michael Porter, considers what value is added to raw materials throughout the process of production (Porter 1998). One interview with an IFAM board member indicated that, “the real question is about value chain equity, like when somebody produces something, do they feel that they're still put in a point of or a place of vulnerability either socially or economically when that object is sold? And if that's the case, then that is pure exploitation” (Board Member). This discussion of value chain equity highlights how the sale of cultural items is not inherently appropriative. Instead, there must be a

consideration of how artists experience this transaction. Interviews with artists did not indicate that they felt vulnerability upon selling their crafts. For many of them, the effect was just the opposite, they felt that through the sale of cultural items they elevated their social and economic position. This is exemplified as many artists are able to assert intellectual property rights over their craft through the Market. While many theorists point to the search for authenticity, as determined by the dominant culture, as a negative consequence of cultural commodification, many artists value the authenticity of their craft. One example of this is in Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco (CTTC), a non-profit organization of indigenous Quechua weavers. In expressing their mission, CTTC writes:

As it was in the past, textiles today form a powerful part of identity. But this identity is at risk. Indigenous people still face racism on a daily basis. A globalized market economy that produces cheap, machine made products destroys respect and interest in the hand-made. Infringement on the intellectual rights of native peoples only makes this worst. Thread by thread, design by design, the weavers from Accha Alta and Acopia, Sallac, Patabamba and six other communities are battling to bring back their traditions from the brink of extinction. Through research and exhibits, the daily use of their textiles and more, the weavers are teaching the world not only why their textiles matter, but showing that they do not reside in the annals of history. Andean textiles are a living tradition. (CTTC Home Page)

This quote expresses the importance of authentic, traditional weaving practices over a “globalized market economy that produces cheap, machine made products” (CTTC Home Page). For these artists, the designation as ‘authentic’ is a means of agency in protecting the intellectual property of native peoples. Further, CTTC emphasizes the importance of this distinction in protecting the textiles which “today form a powerful part of identity.” In highlighting the importance of intellectual property rights, Brown (2003) writes: “The uncontrolled replication of ceremony, music, and graphic arts, which is facilitated by new electronic media, threatens to

strip cultural elements of their history and undermine their authenticity” (Brown 2003, 6).

IFAM’s focus on high quality, authentic goods —juried by the Selection and Placement Committees— works to create a market and a demand for these native made goods. However, does this focus support artists’ agency and development or does it broker cultural appropriation by Western elites?

### **Discussion**

The International Folk Art Market, by nature of its mission, impacts communities around the world as artists travel to Santa Fe each summer to participate in the event. While the unequal relations between “traditional” artisans from the Global South and affluent, largely white consumers from the West engaging in the marketplace for cultural commodities would seem to make the IFAM a prime place to witness cultural appropriation and exploitation, throughout research this summer, the positive effects of the Market have become clear to me. Artists have expressed countless positive impacts that the Market has had on their communities. For many, the Market has allowed them to expand their businesses, employ more people, and increase access to healthcare and education in their area. IFAM has also allowed for the continuation of craft and of traditional knowledge by creating an international market, and a demand for handmade, cultural items. Through interviews and conversations with the artists, it has become clear to me that cultural commodification can be a powerful force for strengthening a sense of pride in artists’ identity. Each year, IFAM receives about 600 artist applications, but can only accept 150 for the Santa Fe Market. For many artists, IFAM is an opportunity of a lifetime. These impacts should not be overlooked.

In addition to the positive experiences that many people have had with the Market, there are also tradeoffs to cultural commodification. Interviews with IFAM staff, board members, and consumers seemed to confirm much of what I found in my literature review. I found that for many Market staff, board, and customers, culture was located elsewhere— in the artists, their cultures, or in other countries. In both formal interviews and in more casual conversation, most of the people I spoke to from these groups didn't think of themselves as being in touch with any culture. Theorists which consider the social legacies of colonialism help to explain why these consumers, staff, and board members largely had not considered their own cultures in relation to the Market. Because culture is largely located in the Global South, it is something that Westerners can access and consume through the market (Comaroff, 2009; Hart, 1997; hooks, 1992; Pletsch, 1981; Root, 1996; Rosaldo, 1989; Rutherford, 1990). This is clear as artists are encouraged to wear traditional clothing and a performance of culture unfolds at the Market. While some interviewees expressed concern that this performance of difference may allow customers to confirm stereotypes of artists, many people cited this performance as one of the most appealing parts of the Market. Literature which spoke to the search for authenticity among 'traditional cultures' helped to explain the performance of culture at the Market, and why it is so appealing for visitors (Dayley, 2011; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2016; Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011). Additionally, artists may gain social and economic agency through this performance of culture. The Market may also be susceptible to cultural appropriation as dominant cultural groups (often the customer at the Market) have the unequal power to determine when, where, and how this cultural transmission takes place.

### **Future Research**

In a future research project I would be interested in considering how immigrants living in the United States, who have cultural heritages represented at the Market, view the event. This demographic would likely comprise of immigrants who may experience marginalization and oppression in the United States. Because assimilation is often expected of immigrants, especially for people of color, I wonder how they view the celebration of culture at the Market. Research questions might include: Are immigrants in the United States less valued or deemed 'inauthentic' because of their desire to be in the U.S.? Do they feel that an individual from a dominant cultural class wearing or displaying an item of folk art is cultural appropriation? This research would provide a broader understanding of the implications of cultural commodification for marginalized communities in the United States.

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