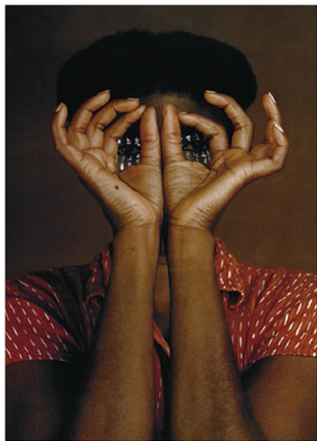


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Fair Trade Heads: A Conversation on Repatriation and Indigenous Peoples with Maria Thereza Alves, Candice Hopkins, and Jolene Rickard



Native American veterans carry the American flag, the wolf pelt staff, and the Haudenosaunee Hiawatha banner following the wampum in the procession commemorating the Canandaigua Treaty of 1794 in 2013



A Mohawk Chief carrying the Hiawatha Belt marches with a Tuscarora Chief who is draped in the George Washington Belt, and a Faithkeeper of the Seneca longhouse carrying the Two Row wampum at the Canandaigua Treaty of 1794 remembrance in 2013 (left to right). The belts confirm the acknowledged agreement on the nation-to-nation relationship between the United States and the Haudenosaunee

The first documenta 14 edition of *South as a State of Mind* featured a roundtable discussion titled “The Indelible Presence of the Gurlitt Estate,” in which Adam Szymczyk spoke with a number of artists and thinkers about the implications of a notorious cache of artworks amassed by the Nazi-connected art dealer Hildebrand Gurlitt, and the legal and ethical morass surrounding its disbursement. But issues of provenance and repatriation are not limited to European modernism and Nazi Germany; they are inextricably related to colonialism and neocolonialism as well.

For Indigenous people, repatriation is predicated on the concept of cultural patrimony, which implies collective ownership, an understanding of property that doesn’t always fit neatly into existing ideologies in Indigenous communities. The first things successfully returned were bodies, in the United States via the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. The law extends to funerary and sacred objects and cultural patrimony—the latter including objects of cultural, historical, and traditional importance for a particular group of people. But such returns can produce complex cultural problems of their own. For example, when the bodies of ancestors were returned home to Haida communities from American museums, ceremonies existed for burial but not for reburial; thus the return of ancestors necessitated the creation of new rituals and the invention of new traditions. Cultural heritage is inalienable, but under the law these things are now also considered *property*, a status that reveals a deep rift between understandings of ownership for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. For Tlingit peoples, for example, the most highly valued regalia, masks, and other objects—the *at.ooow*—are “ownerless,” their caretakers hold them in trust in perpetuity and pass this responsibility on to future generations.

For more than twenty years, Tuscarora artist and scholar Jolene Rickard has observed and commented on the return of wampum to communities in the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy. With their repatriation, the role of wampum in the community shifted to a position that has become increasingly public. Artist Maria Thereza Alves, originally from Brazil and of Guarani, Kaingang, Portuguese, and African descent, has lived and worked in Europe since 1994. Her projects are concerned not only with the repatriation of objects but also with how these returns can enable greater agency for Indigenous peoples in her home country. Research into repatriation and the indelible questions of ownership it raises is part of my own work as a curator, as is considering how exhibitions can restore agency to objects, an agency that is part of what makes conversations on repatriation so important. For Tlingit people, for example, masks and regalia are considered not as objects but as beings. This is a shared view: the recent sale of

Hopi masks at two Paris auctions was so troubling not on the basis of ownership per se (or alone) but because they were no longer in their rightful home, where they not only play a role in ceremony but also receive specific, required care, even feeding. ✕

As Jolene Rickard makes clear, for Haudenosaunee since the 1700s, repatriation has been a means of reinscribing self-determination, demonstrating how wampum is a document of relations between sovereign nations. In Brazil, the context of conversations on repatriation is different. Indigenous peoples remain wards of the state—meaning that an Indian agency has to assist them in any legal matters because they are seen as “relatively incapable” in law, a precarious and an ideologically racist status. What is called for then is a refusal to accept this subjugation, an insistence on speaking for ourselves and our unalienable relationships to objects and the land—and the disruption of authority as it continues to dictate our representations and possess what belongs to us.

—Candice Hopkins

Candice Hopkins: Within Indigenous communities, repatriation started with the bodies of our ancestors, then moved to our things. Now I think the discussion around repatriation has shifted to encompass cultural practices, language, and knowledge, understanding that the three of those aren’t necessarily distinct from each other but work together. Maria Thereza, your work is concerned with the recovery of knowledge. Your project *Fair Trade Head* (2007) is a provocation aimed at European museums. The idea of the piece is that a living person can donate their head to the Muséum d’histoire naturelle de Rouen in exchange for the return of a head from the Rouen collection back to the community of origin in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Can you tell us more about how that project began?

Maria Thereza Alves: I read about the director of the Muséum d’histoire naturelle de Rouen, who wanted to return a tattooed Māori head to a community in New Zealand.¹ The mayor of Rouen was in agreement. But the French minister of culture went to court against the mayor and the museum director, charging them with removing an object that belongs to French patrimony. This is a very serious charge. There was an outcry from different Indigenous communities about the situation, and the French had to back down a little bit. Finally, in 2011 Rouen was allowed to return the Māori head.

I was very angry about all this. The French logic—if one can call it logic—was that because the heads were tattooed, they were no longer actual body parts but artworks. Therefore, as artworks, they could remain in the collection, versus human bodies, which could not. I thought, OK, if we are saying the head of a Māori is an artwork, then if we take a French person who has a tattoo, cut off their head, and put it in a museum in New Zealand, that’s equivalent, right? Because then it too would be an art object.

That’s how I started *Fair Trade Head*. A woman from Lille volunteered. She had no tattoos, so we drew one on her face. Then we simulated cut marks on her neck. She offered to donate her head in exchange for the heads that cannot go back to New Zealand because of the position of the French state. We also wanted to start that project for Brazil—the indigenous Krenak community wanted to create a museum of these European heads on their reservation, but that didn’t happen because the Krenak people confront more pressing issues. The project is actually not about museums or the colonial discourse per se but the idea that your own body can become part of a community decision.

CH Jolene, you have been involved with questions regarding communal versus individual possession and a whole spectrum of issues related to repatriation, specifically with regard to the return of wampum, both within the Tuscarora community and the Iroquois Confederacy as a whole. I thought it could be useful if you might begin by talking about what wampum is. It is often understood as a mnemonic device—a device for remembering—as well as currency and as treaty, but there’s much more to it still.

Jolene Rickard: For the Haudenosaunee, wampum goes back as far as the story of the formation of the *Kayanerenhtsérakó:wa*, the Great Law of Peace, which we think of as happening over a thousand years ago. In it, there’s a mention of stringing beads together as an act of condolence, or easing the sorrow of Hiawatha. So at its root, the process of stringing beads has a connection to lifting the spirit and lifting the mind out of darkness to create a consciousness of peace. Since the contact period, white and purple wampum beads have been made from whelk and quahog shells. The beads are then strung together in individual strands and belts in a very labor-intensive process.

The signification is very complex. Wampum is used to call meetings of the leadership of the Six Nations or Haudenosaunee; each title holder’s authority is signified through a personal wampum string. The belts embody treaties or agreements between Indigenous nations or with settlerstates—but they are a “living record.” There are spiritual or medicinal things one has to do in order to care for these materials. For us, wampum belts are so important because they are like that transitional space between the sacred and the profane, the sacred and the political.

CH How did wampum end up leaving the community, and what led to the development of trying to get them back?

JR Haudenosaunee and European communities, as well as surrounding Indigenous communities, understood wampum as both being a really important political signifier and as having cultural value. There is considerable evidence that we, the Haudenosaunee, were trading wampum with Indigenous people at least in the Northeast Corridor of North America. Some day I think we may find that the trade of wampum was actually far more extensive than that.

In the nineteenth century, when the idea of salvage anthropology was probably at its pinnacle, our wampum, our Hadúi (False Face Masks), and other sacred Haudenosaunee cultural patrimony were at a premium. From the Haudenosaunee side of it, I think we could pretty much say that individuals sold the wampum, and the breakdown of the traditional government created the environment for the illicit sale. It represents a low point in our societal and ceremonial life.

The disruption was probably most severe in Canada, where wampum entered into collections after the imposition of the elective system in Haudenosaunee communities—when, in 1922–24, the Canadian government imposed constitutional governance on First Nations communities and undermined traditional governments. In the United States, the greatest impact came from the 1779 Sullivan-Clinton Campaign, a genocide committed by George Washington against the Cayuga and Seneca people. At that point, between the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, we begin to see a flow of material culture from Haudenosaunee people to the settlers. Then we see the migration of this material into collections.

This material was, from our perspective, taken at a time of war. The resistance in Canada against the return of Haudenosaunee cultural patrimony is ongoing because collectors and museums claim these were legitimate purchases, not the spoils of colonial assault.

CH Sure, they may have a bill of sale for these things, but they are not considering the conditions that led up to the sale, which were of extreme duress.

JR Exactly. And when we began to fight for the repatriation of these belts, we said that it wasn't the right of an individual to turn this collective cultural patrimony over to a museum, an ethnographer, or an anthropologist. So it is a really complex thing. A number of these cases had to be adjudicated in court in order for us to defend our right to our cultural patrimony.

CH What about your research, Maria Thereza? What did you find out about the way that the Māori heads came to be in the collections of museums?

MTA How they were taken is actually well documented. The desire for these heads by collectors in Europe became so great that settlers in New Zealand created circumstances where different Indigenous communities waged war among themselves so that slaves would be taken. They would be tattooed and killed and their heads sold to the Europeans. It was very much a trafficking of body parts based on the desire of the West—at times the body parts of people who had nothing to do with the practice of tattooing. Locally someone's head was never considered an artifact that you would put in a public space. Either museums do not find it within their mandate to concern themselves with how Indigenous communities conceptualize such issues or outright reject them.

CH The legal framework of cultural property as cultural *patrimony* implies collective ownership. But that idea of collectivity can sometimes interfere with understandings of the role of those objects within a community. It can expose differences in a community's understanding of property as soon as one tries to trace the lines of inheritance, particularly when this inheritance

is not patrilineal (as implied in the word patrimony) but matrilineal. It breaks down again when property owned by a specific family is returned to a community at large. X

But I am also interested in how repatriation sets up a negotiation between Western legal frameworks and Indigenous ideologies regarding ownership. For example, after a potlatch on December 1921 on Village Island, off the coast of Vancouver Island, Indian agents working on behalf of the Canadian federal government confiscated potlatch items from the Kwakwaka'wakw people. Forty years later, one of the first attempts by the Kwakwaka'wakw to get them back was simply to pay the amount of money that museums had originally paid the agents to bring them into their collections. But that wasn't seen as enough. For example, the Royal Ontario Museum's response was to say, "Not only do you have to pay us what we paid for these objects, you also have to pay us for what we have put into the care of them over all these years." They wanted to charge them for storage, care, conservation. That first attempt at repatriation failed, and it was only after lengthy negotiations with museums that began in the late 1950s and went throughout the 1970s that some of the items made their way back. Negotiations for the remaining items are still ongoing.

JR Did the Native people have their own bill of expense for their losses during that period of time?

CH They did. They also tried to translate their understanding of value into Western conceptions of value. One example is with the copper shields that were in the collections of high-ranking chiefs in Northwest Coast Native communities. These coppers, as they are known, are the most valuable objects in potlatch economies. Members of the community made the case to Indian agents that coppers are analogous to banks, because the more that they are circulated, the more worth they gain, both in terms of actual fiscal value as well as the cultural value that accrues with these transactions. The sums paid for them and invested in them were extensively documented, but the museum didn't accept that either, because they couldn't understand this other type of value that these objects held.

The concept of cultural patrimony also exposes the different ideologies that underpin the way that things were taken or sold: when they return they are often transformed. One insidious example is that when objects are returned to a community from a museum, they carry the museum context back with them. They become artifacts, distanced from themselves and their original use. There's the idea that museums are now needed to hold them, and they are imbued with these methodologies for display, interpretation, and care back at home.

MTA Very much so. Objects that are repatriated come back laden with the whole discourse of the museum. Back in the community, the object becomes displayed in a way that is neocolonial, and it is very hard for that object to return to its community sense.

CH Sometimes it doesn't even get returned to the community it originally belonged to. For example, one wampum that was originally from Kahnawake was in the collection of the McCord Museum in Montreal. When it was returned, it was in fact returned to Akwesasne, a different Mohawk community.

JR One interesting example of how complex the interactions around public visibility can occur was when I curated *Across Borders: Beadwork in Iroquois Life*, which began in 1995 and traveled extensively for several years throughout Haudenosaunee territories. A passion of mine at the time was to include a wampum belt to reinforce the relationship that our people have to the materiality of the bead—not in the sense of eye-dazzling but instead based on the profound understanding of what these beads represent as part of lifting one's spirit or consciousness.

At that time, which is not long ago, most people in my communities had never seen a wampum belt. There was no public showing of them, and to propose doing so was very controversial. So it was a huge negotiation; there were ethical discussions that had to take place, confederacy politics. As a Tuscarora, I had to seek permission from the Keepers of the Western Door, the Senecas, or the Elder Brothers. To bring the belt to a public space and to have it on view was a very contentious suggestion. A huge cache² had come in from the National Museum of the American Indian (formerly known as the Heye Foundation) in 1988, and I think that began to loosen the sort of taboo against witnessing wampum in public. It became less of a sacred object that couldn't be viewed and had to be cloistered and more an object of cultural pride.



Maria Thereza Alves, *Dicionário Krenak-Português / Português-Krenak*
(Lisbon: Maumaus, 2010)

CH The reason that they were cloistered, was, of course, to protect them; there were moments in all of our cultures when objects and ceremonial practices had to go underground in order for them to be retained. And some objects were secret because they were only used by certain members of society—from my understanding, Jolene, some sacred belts are never intended to be public but only seen by the initiated. With many belts being displayed in a more public manner today, and the oral recitations that accompany their display, it is a way for the community to claim agency over the object. One effect might be greater self-determination.

JR The general climate around the repatriation of belts has reinforced the return of the public recitation of Kayanerenhtserakó:wa, which frames Haudenosaunee philosophy in governing principles—in English, peace, power, and righteousness—and which has wampum belts at its core.

The recitation takes approximately ten days. Its renewal now is the most important evidence of the general resurgence of Haudenosaunee philosophy and culture, and Haudenosaunee people who are faithful to the teachings of Kayanerenhtserakó:wa attend. I attend the public enactment every year, and although recitations have probably been going on in private over the

decades, in my lifetime there have only been four public recitations. The first was by the late Chief Jake Thomas up at Six Nations in 1994, and it was a highly contentious thing. Some people saw it as inappropriate. Now every year the Chiefs, Faithkeepers, Clan Mothers, and other members of the community get together to formally recognize these teachings in a traditional oral recitation. Today we focus on sections and come together for a week or so in the summer. During the recitation, the wampum belts perform one of their jobs, which is helping the speakers recall the ideas of Kayanerenhtserakó:wa. The number of people attending increases every year, and lesser-known belts are turning up and becoming part of the recitation. ✕

CH Speaking of language and recitation, Maria Thereza, could you talk a bit about your dictionary project? When you were in Brazil, you were shown a dictionary translating between the Krenak language and German, and you had the idea to use it to create another dictionary between Portuguese and Krenak. In this way, what was initially a colonial document becomes a way to resist acculturation.

MTA The Krenak people were on the East Coast, and therefore one of the first to get the full colonial situation: they were systematically massacred. Even though they managed to survive, they were declared nonexistent in the 1970s because their lands are extremely valuable—diamonds and I don't know how many dozens of minerals are on their lands. They had to hide their identity because the communities that had declared their existence were totally dismantled and the people dispersed; a lot of the language was destroyed that way. So in 2008, when they found this German-Krenak dictionary online, they were extremely excited.

I was working on the Resplendor reservation in Minas Gerais on the video *Iracema (de Questembert)*. The protagonist is played by Shirley Krenak, who is a leader of her community. It was her brother who brought the printout to me there, which was quite thick, and said, "Can you translate it?" I would come home after work every day and begin translating into Portuguese, but my German was not good enough to do the project justice. I asked for help from a German friend, Jürgen Bock, who is the director of the Maumaus art academy in Lisbon. The Krenak people wanted enough copies of the dictionary to give one to each member of the community—only six hundred had survived the colonization process. We got funding for the translation through the Goethe Institut and for the printing through the 2010 Bienal de São Paulo, where the dictionary was presented.

Once we had the book, the problem was, "How do you reintroduce a language?" We don't have the expertise or training you would need. So Shirley and I kept e-mailing, trying to figure out ways. Shirley said, "We have to do it with kids, because that's the easiest way for the language to stay alive; kids can just memorize things easier than adults." And I said, "Well, kids like animals. Why don't we take all the animal words in the dictionary, then have each kid make a costume and introduce that word into the community in a public ceremony?" We wanted to find ways that the language could be introduced so that all the levels in the community could access it, instead of just dumping all these words that are no longer in use on people.



JR I think what you and I, Maria Thereza, are both talking about is that in order to learn these ideas, it has to be bodily; it has to be experienced. This is where oral recitation is so important. We talk about talking to wampum. People more knowledgeable than me may understand it on a different level, but it's really just making these ideas present. When you talked about the children bringing these words to life that is like the function that wampum takes in our community. It brings these ideas to life.

It is about that relationship to material that seems to be really important, as far as wampum is concerned. When they do the recitation they physically hold the wampum up. All I can say, having witnessed it, is that it is just incredibly powerful. It is like something very old is happening, yet at the same time, it's like, here it is: renewal.

CH The dictionary provided a way to bring about the renewal of the Krenak language. But its distribution became a complex question—it also became an opportunity for members of the Krenak community to assert control over knowledge and its circulation.

MTA After the Bienal, we had to decide what to do about that. Brazilians had been coming up and asking for copies of it. I said, "Well, they are not mine to give. Give me your e-mail, and I'll get back to you." So then Shirley and I talked to figure out what the policy would be. She was very clear. "For five hundred years they never wanted to talk to us, only kill us," she said. "The dictionary is in German, not Portuguese—Brazilians were never interested in us. Therefore they don't get access to the translation." It was a wonderful idea that clearly illustrates the survival tactics of the Krenak people.

Shirley did say that Germans could have access, though. But then a German student wrote to me, asking for a copy in Portuguese, because he was doing a thesis on the Krenak language at a Brazilian university. I wrote to Shirley; I said, "What do we do?" She said if it was a German doing a thesis in Germany we could give it to him. But since he was working with the Brazilians, no. I really admired that ability to look at the situation very clearly in each case and deal with all the political subtleties. When the dictionary is exhibited outside of Brazil, it is in a simple Plexiglas box. When it is exhibited in Brazil, the box has a lock on it.

JR At the recitation of the Kayanerenhtserakó:wa, you are not allowed to record or write anything down; only the chief's council has the authority to document the recitation. And if you are not part of the Haudenosaunee communities, unless you were invited you would be asked to leave. It's not a performance for the edification of those who are simply intellectually curious. This is a part of our strategy for continuing our way of thinking.

Our colleague Audra Simpson, a Mohawk, has a theory of refusal as it relates to access to our traditions, which she presents in her book *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (2014).³ She articulates it through the way in which identity is constructed in our communities.

CH Refusal is a subject that comes up in the conference scene in *Iracema (de Questembert)*—is that right, Maria Thereza?

MTA In that part of the film, Iracema attends an international conference and challenges France about its colonies. Iracema is an Indigenous woman who inherited an estate from a man who thought he was her father, and she was subjected to much resistance from the racist French. So it was important that she denounce the continued colonization by France of Réunion, Tahiti, other parts of the South Pacific, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana. We had some young students from different art academies come in and play the audience. Shirley—who is, again, playing Iracema—has never been invited to participate in any conference with Brazilians in Brazil. She hasn't been invited to give a talk on the land struggle, on their cultural policies, anything. She said, "Thank you, Maria Thereza, because at least once in my life, even though it was only fiction, I was part of a conference."

That is the level of Brazil, the stupidity of reality. At most, if they're forced to, a Brazilian institution will invite a Native person to speak and pair them off with an anthropologist as a partner. At the 2006 Bienal de São Paulo—the theme of which was "How to Live Together"—we publicly questioned the lack of Indigenous land rights and also of indigenous representation, and they responded by inviting Jimmie Durham to come and speak ... with an anthropologist! Of course Durham refused the invitation.

CH Jolene, your work has also demonstrated how we as Indigenous peoples have always been in a dialogue with Europe, whether this is relative to trade or the creation of treaties and other international agreements, most recently the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted in 2007.⁴ I think sometimes that people want to think of us as separate—or irrelevant to conversations on the nation-state, as the comment by Shirley Krenak implies—even within the context of our own home countries, when the reality is anything but. I think it's important to assert international relationships, particularly now with the ratification of the UN declaration by many nations including Canada, the United States, and Brazil, and the hope that it will provide the framework for further agency for Indigenous peoples in all parts of the world.

JR Yes, this idea that Europeans came here and controlled the dialogue, or controlled us, I think is a turn of events based on genocidal acts of war. For three hundred years, Haudenosaunee people tried to maintain a diplomatic relationship with the French and the British, and then the emergent American government made diplomacy no longer tenable. Wampum really embodies that negotiation, the way in which we consolidated these ideas.

The objects, Candice, these material things, that is what the knowledge holders say: "They will present themselves again." It is framed in this language of repatriation. Our people discuss how the ceremonial objects are returning to our communities after being hidden, either by museums or ignorance.

CH Museums are described by the scholar Ira Jacknis as reflexive institutions that present one's culture back to oneself.⁵ Maria Thereza, I thought you used that principle to great advantage in the context of *Fair Trade Head* when it was displayed as part of *The Museum of European Normality*, a project you created in collaboration with Jimmie Durham (which included the

participation of Michael Taussig) for Manifesta 7 in 2008. In the museum, “Europeanness” was reflected back onto itself through the display of artifacts, anthropological studies, and philosophical texts on what European normality looks like post-1945 via a study of its habits and public rituals. I thought the project was very successful in how it exposed contradictions within the self-narration of the West.

MTA Actually you can see it even more clearly in the video *Tchâm Krai Kytôm Pandã Grêt (Male Display Among European Population)* (2008). I was living in Italy, and I noticed that the men are always touching their crotches. I realized that, when I see this in Brazil, it isn’t a local thing; it was imported from Europe.

I decided I would just write to all my male European friends and ask, “When do you touch your crotch and why?” The Northern Europeans, in Sweden and Norway, they say that they never do such a thing. Then you get to Portugal, Spain, and Italy, and there is a whole list of reasons. If a Catholic nun passes you, because she is celibate and you do not want to be, you touch your crotch. If a black cat crosses your path; if a friend says he was just fired from his job; if the mirror breaks, etc. There were more than forty responses I could have used if I had doubled the length of the film.

I screened *Male Display* in Finland, and an Italian curator was very offended by it. I said, “Well, this is a video about a European ritual. We are looking at it as something very strange that is not part of our cultural stuff. Just like you look at our stuff, and we are looking at your stuff.” The curator said, “But that is not a ritual.” She couldn’t stand the fact that the word *ritual* would be connected to a European population. I told her, “The definition of ritual is to perform an action over and over again. You see this all the time in the streets of Italy, in the streets of Portugal, and the streets of Spain—every day, every morning. What else can you call it?”

This is what is nice about doing the project, this reversal. All of a sudden they have to do a double take. They expect to be in the position of the ones who study, but they are forced to realize that there are other people studying them as well. In Europe, European culture isn’t in the museum of ethnography. When I go to one, I always do this little performance for myself; I ask, “Where is the Italian section?” or “Where is the Milanese section?” They say, “Oh, that’s not here in this museum—that would be in the fine arts.” That in itself reveals everything they think about ethnography.


CH Often, objects of ethnography are considered outside time: once contained within a museum or placed on public display, their usual life cycle is denied—totem poles, for example, are meant to fall and eventually decompose on the ground; for some it is when a memorial pole falls that the spirit of the person it was carved for is released. In a museum, it is as though they are petrified or reified. Was this something you both have considered in your work—how, in a museum, these objects are not only taken out of their life cycle but are also never allowed to rest, because they are permanently on view? How then do we again give agency back to not only the people whose lives are intertwined with the objects but to the objects themselves.

JR When wampum belts are made public at the Kayanerentserakó:wa, the knowledge contained within them is activated. Something similar occurs when the belts are used in key treaty enactments, for example the Border Crossing Celebration that commemorates the Jay Treaty of 1794 (which began through the efforts of the Indian Defense League of America, founded by my grandfather, Chief Clinton Rickard, in 1926). Haudenosaunee people march in our homelands at the border between the United States and Canada to claim our right to unhindered passage in our ancestral lands. To take another case, every year on November 11, G. Peter Jemison, a Seneca artist and Faithkeeper, leads the Canandaigua Treaty of 1794 enactment, which marks the day and location that the United States, by its own law, recognized Haudenosaunee sovereignty. The belt confirming this relationship is called the George Washington Belt and is a covenant belt that depicts the thirteen original United States. At the Canandaigua Treaty march, the George Washington Belt, the Hiawatha Belt, and the Two Row Belt are carried by chiefs who hold the same titles as the men who signed this treaty with the U.S. in 1794. Because the belts are a living record of this relationship, the chiefs are not performing the past but enacting our present.

I don’t think that most people understand the significance of this kind of action. It has taken me a while to really understand how profound it is, and the depth of the role that wampum play in our lives. So it’s not simply about recovering something from a museum.


CH Of course, in order to even begin a conversation about a community’s rights to their objects and knowledge, its members have to possess very basic human rights. What about the rights of the people themselves? How has the status of Indigenous people in Brazil changed since the reformist constitution of 1988?

MTA A good example is something that just happened, in December 2015. There was a proposal for a law that had passed through the legislature. It was a very simple thing: it would increase the teaching of Indigenous languages, extending it from grammar schools to high schools and universities. One concrete example of how this would affect the Indigenous population was that of a Tucano doctoral candidate at the University of the Amazon who wanted to present his thesis in his own language because concepts in it are not translatable into Portuguese.


A woman with dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt and a necklace, stands in a narrow, old European street. She is holding a tablet computer. The street is flanked by old stone buildings with windows and balconies.

We are here in a typical town in Europe investigating the custom of some European males to touch their testicles in public.

Our informer has agreed to reveal some of the secrets surrounding this ritual...

A close-up shot of the woman from the previous frame. She now has dark, tribal-style face paint or markings on her cheeks and chin. She is looking slightly to the side with a slight smile.

Can you demonstrate?

A close-up shot of a man with short, light-colored hair, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. He is looking slightly to the side and speaking.

If a black cat crosses the road while I am driving, then I stop the car.



Maria Thereza Alves, *Tchâm Krai Kytôm Pandã Grét (Male Display Among European Populations)* (2008), digital SD-video, sound, color, 2.21 min.

It is very difficult in Brazil to get any progressive legislation on Indigenous people. The Congress is made up almost entirely of the landowning European-descended elite. Indigenous peoples are always in a struggle with them. But this law finally got through, and then on December 29, the president of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, vetoed it. Her office issued a statement saying that it would be “contrary to the public interest.” Contrary to the public interest: How can she say that? She can say that because Indigenous people are not considered human beings in Brazil. Because it’s obviously in their public interest. The legal dispute is ongoing, since the constitution of 1988 clearly states that the Indigenous culture must be respected as a separate culture. To deny that the language should be taught at university level is against the constitution and therefore illegal. I don’t know what is going to happen with it. But the fact is that in Brazil, until 1988, Indigenous people were considered minors, and so they were under the guardianship of the federal government. What that means is that you are considered a child and can do nothing on your own.

There’s a sad case of a group in the Amazon, I think it was in the 1990s, about a dozen members of an Indigenous group. They were being shot at by every landowner in the vicinity. Every single member of the group had at least one bullet embedded in their skin. Finally they got on a bus—and it is very hard to get on a bus in the Amazon, because there are so few buses on the Amazon highway. They just wanted to get out of there. The driver called the federal government, soldiers, and told them that Native people were on the bus—and that couldn’t be, because they cannot travel by themselves; as minors legally, they have to have a chaperone. So an anthropologist took them back. In an interview he explained that in the city they would “lose” their culture. So he took them back to where they were being shot at.

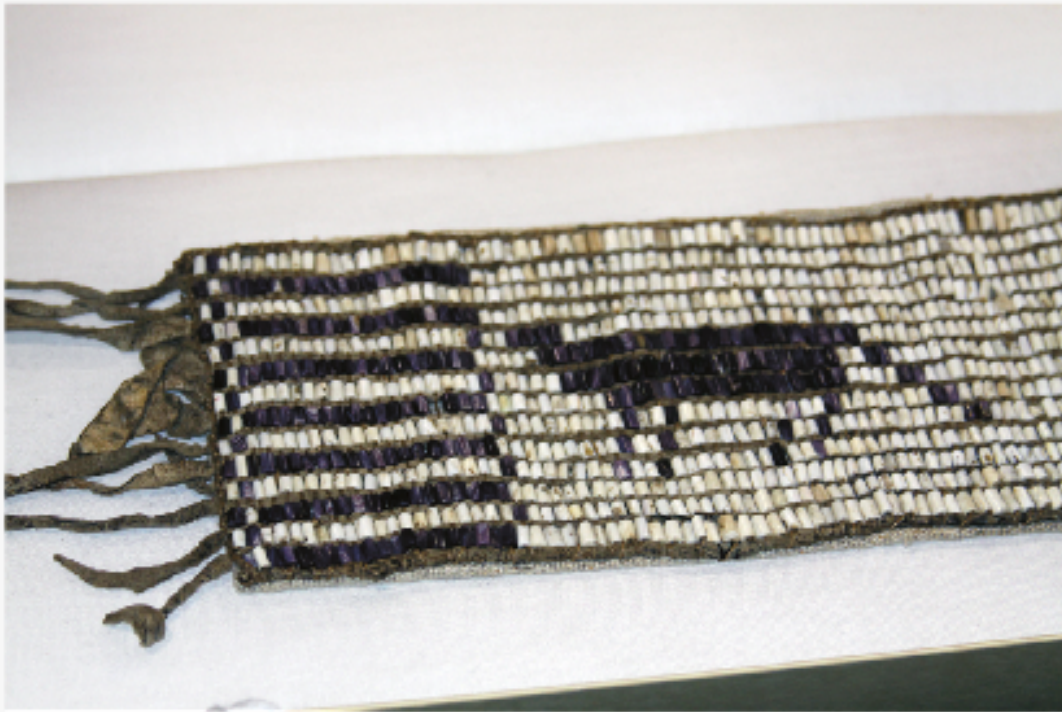
The situation pre-1988 affects everything. It accounts for the fact that there are no Indigenous artists visible in the Brazilian art world. We have Indigenous writers mostly working on stories for children but not much academic writing yet. This will change in the next five years, which will be amazing, because the constitution of 1988 allowed Indigenous people into higher education.⁶ But this is only happening now, which means there is very little history available that isn’t from the settler’s point of view—even if the histories are written by settlers in solidarity.

JR You know, Maria Thereza, at Cornell we are collaborating with a Brazilian university, the Federal University of São Carlos in São Paulo, to bring Indigenous students to Cornell for science education. The extraction of knowledge from Indigenous peoples is now being reversed. The students are coming to understand the best practices in scientific inquiry and they will decide if and when their Indigenous plant knowledge will be shared. This is a new turn in thinking about the terms of repatriation.

MTA I was trying to do something similar with Germany. I was talking to a schoolteacher on a reservation in São Paulo. I said: “What is needed in this community, university-wise?” She said: “We need dentists.” So I went to the German Dental Association and asked if they could support the education of two or three Indigenous students in Brazil. They said, “Well, we can do it if they come to Germany.” But this is impossible—how am I going to find an Indigenous student in Brazil that speaks fluent enough German when the community has been systematically denied access to education?

Right now the first groups of Indigenous students are getting their master’s degrees, the first dozen are getting their doctorates. There has been immense pressure on them to study anthropology, because then they are reporting on their own culture to the anthropologists who are their professors. There are almost never grants available for Indigenous students to study anything else. There is a student at a university in the Amazon who wanted to study philosophy. There was no way. He got to the master’s level, and he couldn’t continue economically. He too ended up having to study anthropology. I am in an absolute rage that this person who wanted to contribute to philosophy is instead forced into anthropology because of the anthropologist’s desire for an inside informant. Unfortunately, this is the case even among anthropologists committed to Indigenous communities.

It is very simple. There are six hundred Indigenous students, last time I checked, in Brazilian universities. Most cannot afford to complete their studies due to lack of funds, for books, equipment, housing, food, transportation, and so on. So I did the math. If they were to receive more or less five thousand dollars each, that would total three million dollars a year. It is not a huge amount of money. We can change the face of thought in Brazil forever, just with three million a year, for let’s say ten years. That is all we need: thirty million to change it.



Details of the Wolf Belt, photographed at the recitation of the Kayanerenhtserakó:wa (Great Law) at Akwesasne in 2015. The overall size of the belt is 82.55 x 11.2 cm. The wolf is the guardian of the eastern door of the longhouse or confederacy; the seven purple stripes at the end represent nations and the two figures represent friendship

1 Discussed in Emma Cox, "Economies of Atonement in the European Museum: Repatriation and the Post-Rational," in *Performances of Capitalism, Crises and Resistance: Inside/Outside Europe*, ed. Marilena Zaroulia and Philip Hager (London: Palsgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 211-23.

2 The eleven belts returned are discussed in Moira G. Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

3 Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

4 See the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples online: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf.

5 This idea is developed in Ira Jacknis, *The Storage Box of Tradition: Kwakiutl Art, Anthropologists, and Museums, 1881–1981* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2002).



6 Chapter VIII of the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 is devoted to indigenous rights. See relevant sections online: <http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/brazil-eng/chaper%206%20.htm>.

