Learning to become and belong:
A study of participation in sociocultural activity in Gunayala

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A STUDY OF PARTICIPATION IN SOCIOCULTURAL ACTIVITY IN GUNAYALA

Abstract

This study sets as its central problem the question of whether, and how, participation in shared sociocultural activity enables and mediates the learning of girls and women in Gunayala. In line with the existing literature on anthropological approaches to learning, the study primarily uses interviews and observation to examine how Guna girls and women learn and develop through the shared practice of making *Molas*, which is rooted in the broader cultural traditions of the community. It argues that through participation in shared sociocultural activity, women in Gunayala learn to become independent and interdependent as well as to belong within their community and wider world. Failing to draw on this understanding of learning as situated and a process resulting from participation has far-reaching implications with regards to the way Guna children are educated and thence how the community is able to reproduce itself.

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1. Introduction

Foreboding prognostications of a "failing" educational system in the so-called "Third World" have been pervasive since the 1960s, when the notion of a global education "crisis" was initially proposed. Such concerns have prompted responses by governments, international agencies and local institutions alike to raise enrolment and learning outcomes within schools in hopes of ameliorating the issue. Yet, sociocultural theories of learning, that began to popularize in the 1990s, questioned the heavy emphasis on measuring learning through standard scholastic assessments and suggested that this narrowly formalistic understanding of learning may only provide a partial explanation for the "crisis" in learning. Instead, such theories indicated that failing to excel scholastically does not necessarily equate to impaired intellectual functioning, but that the latter may, in part, be due to the inability of schooling to welcome and assess the learning that children already bring to the classroom. This study draws these sociocultural theories of learning to the fore and provides an empirical study to illustrate them in the particular context of Gunayala. By understanding the processes of learning through this lens, the paper aims to unpack and advance the knowledge of learning as participation in collective activity within a community. It is hoped that this understanding may help bridge the gap between knowledges that children acquire at home, and what they are expected to learn and know in school.

Theories of learning have focused variously on conditioned responses (Skinner, 1974), modelling (Bandura, 1977) and cognition (Hutchins, 1995), suggesting that knowledge is largely cerebral and taking the individual in isolation as the nonproblematic unit of analysis. Learning in this way is viewed as an individual process, with a beginning and an end, and which is best separated from other human activities (Wenger, 2018). Yet, the work of Russian theorist Lev Vygotsky in the 1970s shifted the analytic focus away from the individual to that of activity within interconnected activity systems in the community. These theories began to conceptualize learning as inherently contextual and as a result of participation within the shared practice of the broader community. Vygotsky's work gave rise to the Sociocultural or Cultural-Historical and Activity Theory (CHAT) schools of thought, and it is this understanding of learning that forms the basis for the study at hand.

This dissertation locates itself within the Sociocultural or CHAT school of thought and sets as its central problem the question of whether (and how) participation in shared sociocultural activity enables and mediates the learning of girls and women in Gunayala. Drawing on anthropological studies of learning, this study primarily uses interviews and

observation to examine how Guna girls and women learn and develop through the shared practice of making *Molas*, which is rooted in the broader cultural traditions of the community. It argues that through participation in shared sociocultural activity, women in Gunayala learn to become independent and interdependent as well as to belong within their community and wider world. Failing to draw on this understanding of learning as situated and a process resulting from participation has far-reaching implications with regards to the way Guna children are educated and thence how the community is able to reproduce itself.

For one, where the narrow teaching and assessment framework of schools undervalue the knowledges that children bring to the classroom, this often results in poor scholastic performance and fewer opportunities for Guna children down the line. At the same time, increased emphasis on children learning within the school curriculum has led to the decline of more local and traditional forms of learning, resulting in malnourishment, weakened cultural and socio-political structures, and mass migration to city centres, among others.

In light of this reality, the academic literature on learning often draws the battle lines of education along "formal" versus "informal" lines. On the one hand, there are those who argue for increased focus on enrolment and retention in schools based on the belief that education achieves prosperity and prosperity equals increased freedoms (see World Bank, 2018). On the other hand, there are those who reject "western" or "formal" schooling, making the case that it does more harm than good by detaching people's education from their spiritual values, environment, livelihoods and communities, leading to uncertain futures (see Skinner et al., 2016). It is argued here that such a bipartite contestation is unhelpful, since ultimately neither system alone is sufficient to achieve *buen vivir* (Brown & McCowan, 2018). Instead, both systems (traditional, cultural education and more "formal", modernized schooling) must be reconciled in order for education to be the "practice of freedom" (Freire, 1996; Sen, 1999) many hope and envision it to be. In order for this to occur, our understanding of learning must open spaces to value indigenous forms of knowledge both in and outside the classroom. The dissertation argues that we must strive for braided futures: a re-imagining of formal education as it stands today, an education that embraces multiple forms of creating knowledge and that can be a transformative force for human flourishing.

This study is structured into six chapters, of which this introduction is the first. The second reviews the existing literature to clarify concepts and the theoretical framework which lay the base for a study of learning as participation in sociocultural activity. Thirdly, a methodology chapter examines the approaches and methods chosen in line with the research question at

hand. This section includes the philosophical underpinnings of the study, my own positionality as the researcher, participants involved, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis, and limitations to the study. A fourth chapter presents the findings and discussion wherein the data is interpreted, presented and analysed to answer the research question in three main sections. The fifth chapter takes a step back from the immediate research question to reflect on the broader implications of the study at hand. The final chapter concludes the study, providing a summary of the key argument, and highlighting the importance of this kind of research to address current educational realities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Context

2.1.1 Gunayala and the Gunadule

Gunayala is an autonomous indigenous territory comprising part of the Caribbean coast of Panama, the San Blas islands, and a portion of the Gulf of Urabá in north-western Colombia. Population estimates vary greatly from approximately 85,000 people (MUMO, 2020), to a more moderate 65,000 (Carvajal & Aguilar, 2012; Stócel, 2011). Of these, 97% live in Panama, primarily in the archipelago currently comprising the *Comarca* (territory) Gunyala and in Panama City, while the other 3% inhabit Colombia's north-western indigenous reserve called *Ibgigundiwala* (MUMO, 2020; Stócel, 2011). The focus of this study is on the *Comarca* Gunayala.

The Guna people, referred to as *Gunadule*, are among 8 other indigenous groups officially recognized by the Panamanian government as possessing all the rights of Panamanian citizens, as well as the rights to conserve their own culture, traditions and worldview (Davis, 2010). While this latter has been set down in several declarations over the years since Panama became a republic in 1903, the road to having these rights legitimized has been long and remains incomplete. The struggle for the conservation of the Guna way of living lies beyond political settlements alone, but rests as well with the structures and expectations of their educational system, rooted in a long history of colonial and nationalizing interests (see Appendix A). Such a view becomes important to understand the disconnect between "formal" and cultural learning in Gunayala. However, the primary interest of this investigation lies in understanding how Guna women's learning and transformation is mediated by the sociocultural activity of sewing molas.

2.1.2 The Guna Mola

Molas are hand-made textiles that comprise the chest and back panels of the blouses Guna women wear. The word Mola, from the Guna *mol* or *momol*, means butterfly (Stócel, 2011), in reference to the bright colours and elaborate geometric shapes that comprise the designs. The fabric panels are manufactured by Guna women using what is known as a reverse appliqué technique wherein layers of different coloured cloth are cut away to reveal the colour

of the next layer in a chosen design, leaving only the bottom (base) fabric as the background. It is believed that Guna women began using the reverse appliqué technique to make molas at the beginning of the 19th century (MUMO, 2020). Historically, geometric designs were painted directly onto the women's skin using naturally staining fruits and seeds. After Spanish colonization, such designs were painted directly onto cloth, and eventually evolved into the technique used today. Similarly, while molas used to be full-length, covering down to the woman's heels, they now comprise only the front and back piece of the Guna blouse. Molas are worn along with the *saburedi* (wrap-around skirt), the *wini* and *chaquiras* (beaded designs worn on the arms and legs), and a brightly coloured headpiece, which together make up the Guna women's traditional attire. Guna women typically have many different Molas, some for every-day use, and others which they make and wear for specific ceremonies or celebrations. The designs on the molas vary greatly according to the woman's creativity, and the occasion for which the mola is made. These have also shifted over time. More recently, they often display colourful animal and nature designs, which are considered more commercial. Some Guna women still prefer the ancestral designs which are more abstract and geometrical and are said to carry the *burba* (spirit), of that which is depicted. Molas are central to the culture and identity of the Guna people, and particularly central to the learning and development of Guna women.



Figure 1. A collection of Mola panels hung as decoration. These are a mix of ancestral geometric designs and depictions of nature.

It is this nexus that is the central plank of Sociocultural and Activity Theory. Cultural tools and artefacts, such as Molas, both shape the identity of young Guna women and are in turn shaped by them. Learning is therefore mediated by cultural tools and through participation in cultural activity. It is easy for this thesis of learning to be misconstrued as "informal", and for some, therefore, unimportant.

2.2 Conceptualizing Schooling and Learning

The simple dichotomy between “formal” and “informal” schooling is unproductive and misleading. Many communities have long had indigenous forms of formal education, such as religious schooling, apprenticeship, and initiation lessons, which far preceded what we typically consider “formal” schooling today (Akinnaso, 1992). Moreover, varying levels of formality may be found even within one type of education, such as apprenticeship (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Instead, I will make a distinction, in line with Cole (2005) between “schooling” as the deliberate instruction for specific skills occurring through the formal education system, and “enculturation” as the induction of individuals into the cultural order of society, both of which may occur at varying levels of formality.

Understanding how “formal” or “western-style” schooling arose in response to specific needs and based on certain beliefs about the nature of learning helps demonstrate why, even today, sociocultural understandings of learning are minimally recruited into the curriculum. “Formal” schooling spread primarily in the 1800s and early 1900s out of a need to handle education for a growing population and increased productivity in an era of rapid industrialization and urbanization (Cole, 1996). Fundamentally, the way these schools were established was rooted in the assumption that learning could take place as an isolated process. Three central characteristics of this type of schooling hold to this day: firstly, the student was trained by strangers, separated from kind and family; secondly, knowledge slated for transmission was differentiated and compartmentalized into fields of specialization (i.e. disciplines); and thirdly, learning took place outside the contexts of its intended implementation (i.e. students rehearsed knowledge "out of context"), (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2012; Cole, 1990; LeVine & White, 1986).

This form of schooling became the norm in the Western world and was seen as a key tool for civilizing those who had not yet “progressed” to this stage (Adams, 1988; Wagua, 2007). Today “western-style” schooling has become a pervasive fact of life throughout the world (Rogoff, 2003). Certainly, locally traditional forms of enculturation (even of schooling) have by no means been obliterated, sometimes coexisting with, or preceding the mostly universal ‘culture of formal schooling’ supported by, and supportive of, the nation state (Cole, 2005; LeVine & White, 1986; Wagner, 1993). Still, whether sought after or forced, “Western” schooling “has been one of the most influential means of cultural change for children and families in the past century and a half” (Rogoff, 2003, p.340).

The debate on whether or not “formal” schooling has caused more harm than good is a complex one and beyond the scope of this paper. However, sociocultural theorists have

examined the dissonance between understanding learning narrowly as what occurs in the classroom (measured primarily through formal scholastic assessments), and a broader understanding of learning, often less easily measured. The implications of this disconnect become important to the rationale of this study.

On the one hand, understanding learning narrowly as the acquisition of scholastic knowledges paints a bleak picture of our educational reality, particularly in developing countries. The shape of formal schooling and structures of formal education are themselves perceived as being in a state of crisis as the educational outcomes expected of schooling are not realized. Talk of a "crisis" in education's ability to match performance with expectations (Coombs, 1968), and of "growing maladjustments between education systems and the rapidly changing world" resulting in "a crisis of confidence in education itself" (Coombs, 1985) have been pervasive since Phillip Coombs 'initial theory in 1968. Difficulty with academic content or scholastic testing, and lack of opportunity upon finishing school has led many would-be learners to consider education irrelevant (Lopez, 2017) and, as Wenger (2018) states, "most of us come out of this treatment feeling that learning is boring and arduous, and that we are not really cut out for it" (p.220). Moreover, where difficulties in school intersect with systemic inequalities—as is the case for indigenous communities (and especially women) across Latin America (UNDP, 2016), the real-life consequences of this "crisis" in education are more acute.

On the other hand, while this assessment of education as being in a state of "crisis" points to some of the important shortcomings and challenges that our education systems face, it fails to tell the full story. In fact, anthropological studies of learning began to show that people who performed poorly on researcher's tests also showed impressive skill in reasoning or remembering (or other cognitive skills that the tests were supposed to measure) outside of the test situation (Cole, 1996; Nunes, Schliemann, & Carraher, 1993; Rogoff & Waddell, 1982; Serpell, 1993). As a result, it became clear that until that point, studies on human development and psychology primarily examined learning on the basis of ethnocentrically rooted assumptions about students' processes through systems of instructional learning (LeVine & White, 1986; Rogoff, 2003). In short, "when schooling appeared to induce new cognitive abilities, it might well be because the entire structure of standardized testing procedures served as covert models of schooling practices" (Cole, 2005, p.206). This has led many to question how we assess learning and whether these forms of assessment are able to paint a complete picture of how we learn (Johnson, 2003; Johnson & Hsieh, 2014; Johnson & Kress, 2003; Magrath, Aslam, & Johnson, 2019). This paper draws on such studies to suggest a broader

understanding of learning as participation in sociocultural activity. It is argued that failing to recruit this understanding of learning into our education systems widens the disconnect between learning in the community and in the classroom.

Jerome Bruner (1996) sums up nicely the dangers in allowing education to lose relevance: "Education *is* risky, for it fuels the sense of possibility. But a failure to equip minds with the skills for understanding and feeling and acting in the cultural world is not simply scoring a pedagogical zero. It risks creating alienation, defiance, and practical incompetence. And all of these undermine the viability of a culture" (p.42). Therefore, any approach to understanding learning must, as Lave & Wenger (1991) suggest, shift the analytic focus "from the individual as learner to learning as participation in the social world, and from the concept of cognitive process to the more-encompassing view of social practice" (p.43). Precisely this approach is taken in the empirical study at hand, which aims to make a contribution to the literature on anthropological understandings of learning.

2.3 The Sociocultural Approach to Learning

As far back as the early 1900s, the field of psychology was grappling with questions of how to study the mind. In a 1901 Presidential Address, John Dewey argued that psychology "would have to come to terms with how individuals are culturally, historically, and institutionally situated before it could understand many aspects of mental functioning (Dewey, 1901). Yet according to Wertsch (1993), Dewey's ideas never attained prominence in American psychology, which remains quintessentially a psychology of the individual organism. Behaviourist and cognitivist theories of learning were cases in point (Schunk, 2014).

In contrast, for Vygotsky, in the tradition of Marx and Engels, the mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture (Cole & Scribner, 1978, p.7). He shifted the unit of analysis away from the individual as a passive recipient of information, to that of action, wherein human beings are viewed as coming into contact with, and creating, their surroundings as well as themselves through the actions in which they engage (Miller, 1994). Sociocultural theory (Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990, 2003), Activity Theory (Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki-Gitai, 1999), or Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Cole, Engeström, & Vasquez, 1997; Wolff-Michael & Lee, 2007), and distributed cognition (Hutchins, 1995), all arose within the tradition of Vygotskian thought. This line of theorizing penetrated Western academia rather late, largely influenced by Michael

Cole's work. In fact, in 1993 Yrjö Engeström called activity theory "the best kept secret of academia" (p. 64). Since then, the approach has been further elaborated by several contemporary scholars and has increased in popularity both in the former socialist countries and in the West, in part due to Engeström himself (Engeström et al., 1999; Wolff-Michael, 2004). Even so, the bulk of more recent sociocultural and activity-theoretical publications remain scattered and often difficult to obtain (Engeström et al., 1999). Moreover, similar but distinct veins of theorizing based on Vygotsky's work make it difficult to outline a single unitary model to understand sociocultural processes of learning. For the study at hand, while it is useful to draw on a range of the literature in the field, emphasis is placed on the sociocultural approaches to learning espoused by Rogoff, Lave and Wenger, which lend themselves to an analysis of systems and processes of situated learning within cultural communities.

Fundamentally, sociocultural and activity theory are conceptualized in terms of the entwined relationship between a) human mental functioning, and b) the cultural, historical and institutional setting in which it occurs (Alvarez, del Río, & Wertsch, 1995). In this sense, they are predicated on the relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing drawn in Bordieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977). In this view, knowledge of the world (itself socially constituted) is understood as socially mediated and open ended: "its meaning to given actors, its furnishings, and the relations of humans with/in it, are produced, reproduced, and changed in the course of activity" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As such, this theory understands learning as the historical production, transformation, and change of individuals through ongoing participation in shared activity.

Three core elements found in the literature merit special attention in order to unpack this crucial understanding of learning as social transformation. This is done in three sections. The first looks at the setting or context in which learning takes place, localizing learning in the naturally occurring practice of shared activity. The second section draws from the literature the question of artefact-mediated learning, wherein cultural tools and artefacts (including ideational or symbolic artefacts) are believed to fundamentally influence learning as mediators of psychological processes. The third and final section contends with the fundamental tension of learning as internalization versus transformation, by which individuals are seen as agentic participants in "Communities of Practice" or "activity systems", themselves dynamically interconnected.

2.3.1 The Social Context of Learning

The sociocultural approach localizes learning in every-day practice. That is, learning occurs through participation in the naturally occurring activities of daily life within a community. Cultural practices or activities have provided a useful analytical focus for many concerned with the study of culture, learning, and development (Cole, 1996; Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003; Saxe, 1999; Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, 1998). In these studies, opportunities for learning arise from participation in the daily activities of the home or community. Whether structured as an apprenticeship at varying levels of formality (such as Vai and Gola tailors in Liberia, or midwives in Mayan communities in Guatemala), or simply through engagement at mealtimes, the social activities of the community provide the settings through which learning takes place. In this way, the practice of the community creates the potential "curriculum" in the broadest sense (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and the individual's learning process occurs through participation in the practices of the community.

Crucially here, learning through participation in shared activity is structured and mediated through relations with others. Every social situation presents an opportunity to participate in cultural practice, which itself leads to learning. Vygotsky's (1978) notion of a Zone of proximal development (ZPD), is helpful here to understand the structures that allow for this learning to occur. ZPD is defined as the distance between a child's independent problem-solving capacity and their potential capacity in collaboration or guided by more capable peers. In other words, "what is the zone of proximal development today will be the actual developmental level tomorrow – that is, what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.87). Varying interpretations of this zone exist (see Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.48), including an understanding of ZPD as a kind of "scaffolding" by which children's learning is mediated by more experienced adults. Others have broadened the understanding of ZPD to include various forms of learning in relation to peers, and even unconsciously through observation and modelling (Gregory, Ruby, & Kenner, 2010), through play (Goodwin, 1990; Kress, 1997; Rogoff, 1981, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978) and through dreams (Dehart, 2010; Mallon, 2002; Stickgold et al., 2001; Wagner et al., 2004). Learning is therefore localized in and mediated by relations with social others in the every-day practice of the community.

2.3.2 Artefact Mediated Learning

A second core element of sociocultural and activity theories is that the cultural tools and artefacts that people encounter as they participate in the activities of daily life are critical to the nature of the learning and development that arises (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Such "mediational means", in the study at hand the Mola and oral narratives, offer a teaching tool and a way of engaging with and creating meaning. These mediational means not only facilitate action that could have occurred without them. Instead, as Vygotsky noted, by being included in the process of behaviour, the psychological tool (such as language, works of art, writing, etc) alters the entire flow and structure of mental functions (Wertsch, 1993, 1998). While Vygotsky himself privileged verbal forms of mediation (Wolff-Michael & Lee, 2007), later findings such as those of Rogoff (2003) revealed an ethnocentric bias, which underlined such a heavy focus on speech above other mediational means (Wertsch, 1993). Instead, later sociocultural and activity theorists pushed for a more culturally aware understanding of other modes (often nonverbal including gesture or expression) as tools for mediating learning (Kress et al., 2014; Rogoff, 1990; Wolff-Michael & Lee, 2007).

Theories on multiliteracies and multimodal meaning-making suggested that children are, in fact, meaning-makers from a very early age, and they use available materials and cultural artefacts in creative ways to design and re-design meaning which is represented in different forms (Kress, 1997). For instance, some studies demonstrated differences in children's reproduction of patterns depending on their familiarity with the particular materials in particular processes (Serpell, 1979). Children reportedly performed better when reproducing patterns in a familiar medium and poorly if the medium was unfamiliar (Rogoff, 2003, p.239). This raised questions about how learning was being assessed, and about what constitutes literacy, ultimately broadening the understanding of literacy to include not just the ability to speak, read and write, but rather a set of practices, forms of knowledge, and variety of resources for representation and communication that enable individuals to participate and function fully in society (Johnson & Kress, 2003). Where scholastic assessments are unable to measure and thus value such multiliteracies, other modes of meaning-making are excluded from the classroom, which can have negative repercussions on learning outcomes and student's motivation to learn (Johnson, 2003).

2.3.3 Internalization Versus Transformation

Sociocultural and activity theorists share what Lave and Wenger (1991) call an interest in "taking into account in a central way the conflictual nature of social practice" (p.49). This is

the third critical element in the literature at hand, which points to the tension between learning as internalization and reproduction versus learning that opens the possibilities for transformation. When learning is viewed primarily as an isolated cognitive process, knowledge is construed as the internalization of information. This is what Paulo Freire (1996) calls a "banking" system of education, in which students are viewed as empty receptacles awaiting the teacher's deposits of packaged information in order to reproduce the status quo. In contrast, learning as participation in social activity suggests that learners both contribute to the reproduction of the society, as well as become agentic participants in their own development and thus help transform the action in which they engage.

On the one hand, as individuals learn and are formed through participation in cultural practice, they help sustain the activity system of the community at large. What Roth and Lee (2007) call third-generation activity theorists endorse the fact that all activity systems are part of a network of activity systems, which in their totality constitute human society. Similarly, a sociocultural approach would see the interaction between different, overlapping and sometimes contradictory Communities of Practice[1] as this shared network of systems (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this sense, as individuals contribute to one activity system or Community of Practice, they contribute to the reproduction of society as a whole (Engeström et al., 1999; Wolff-Michael & Lee, 2007). Thus, the survival of a community rests on its capacity to reproduce itself through the development of individuals engaging in productive activity.

At the same time, however, this is not a static process. Instead, learning implies a certain dynamism that results from the growth, change, and development of individuals as they learn with/in and simultaneously affect their community. When action is given analytic priority, human beings are viewed as participants who come into contact with and influence their surroundings and themselves through the actions in which they engage (Wertsch, 1998, p.8). In this perspective, as Rogoff (2003) suggests, culture is not merely an entity that influences individuals. Rather, people contribute to the creation of cultural processes and cultural processes contribute to the creation of people. Thus, "individual and cultural processes are mutually constituting rather than defined separately from each other" (Rogoff, 2003, p.51). In the same vein, Freire (1996) calls for "problem-posing education" in which "people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process,

[1] A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.98).

in transformation (p.83). Significantly, the form of action individuals adopt is to a large extent "a function of how they perceive themselves in the world" (Freire, 1996, p.83). This is critical to an understanding of learning as both individual and social transformation.

2.4 Research Rationale

In more recent years, the contexts under which studies on sociocultural and activity theories are being conducted are wide-ranging. However, these studies seem to be moving further away from the original conception of the theories. Wolff-Michael (2004) suggests that more recent uses of activity theory have lost touch with some of the more fundamental Marxist principles upon which the theory was based, arguing that "coincident with the absence of Marx in the literature is the absence of some key Marxian concepts […] without which activity theory makes little sense and gives rise to misunderstanding, perhaps even misconceptions". Instead, recent studies mostly draw on isolated elements of sociocultural and activity theory to study or adapt elements within the classroom. These could be roughly broken down into a) models of apprenticeship-type schooling (see for example Chan, 2013, 2014; Worthen, 2011), and b) efforts to modify standard curricula in a way that builds upon indigenous enculturation practices either as a supplement or a 'bridge' to standard schooling (Cole, 2005, p.212, for examples see Blasco-Serrano, Pérez, & Garrido Laparte, 2019; Chesworth, 2018; Lindsay, 2011; Moll, 2020).

The use of underlying principles of sociocultural and activity theory have also changed in important ways. For instance, there has been a shift in understanding communities of practice as an endemic phenomenon that occurs naturally, to one that can be explicitly created and fostered (Gee, 2004; Hoadley, 2012). This has led to some interesting new research and initiatives within classrooms to bridge the gap between home and school learning (see Jensen, 2009; Morrell, 2009). In newer studies school-based initiatives are often related to the increased use of digital technologies meant to improve learning in schools by supporting or fostering digital communities of practice (Hoadley, 2012). Yet often these initiatives, based as they are on widespread deterministic discourse lauding the ability of new digital technologies to address the learning gap across populations actually fail to do so (Selwyn, 2014). In contrast, recent studies have tended to move away from the original theoretical principles of the sociocultural literature. Moreover, learning in "non-educational" settings remains under-investigated by educational researchers (Delamont, 2005). This study therefore aims to re-

emphasize and return to the first principles of the anthropological literature on learning by re-localizing the study in the context of community activities in the chosen setting.

2.5 Research Question

In light of the above, the aim of this paper is to re-imbed critical sociocultural theory into a study of learning itself through the exploration of how participation in the activities of their community (in this case Mola-making and the oral tradition) structures and mediates the learning of Guna women and girls. The research question posed is therefore: *Does their participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities mediate and enable the learning of girls and women in Gunayala?*

It is hoped that this approach to learning may (and, as Wolff-Michael (2004) contends, can) offer the possibility to overcome some of the crucial divides between theory and praxis, between decontextualized and embodied knowledge, and the apparent disjunction between individual learners with other learners and their social environments, besides recovering more humane, and socially responsive (and responsible) forms of education.

3. Methodology

3.1 Overview

This study aims to understand processes of learning that Guna girls and women experience as they are mediated by the cultural practice of the Mola. As such, the endeavour is both deeply context and culture specific as well as historical. The chosen methods, therefore, must meet the demands of this aim. To do so, and in fitting with the theoretical framework explored previously, a largely anthropological approach was taken, capitalizing especially on observation and semi-structured interviews as the methods to gather data, in collaboration with key participants. Such a project fits paradigmatically into a newer wave of critical and anticolonial research geared towards reframing the relationships between the researched and the researcher and challenging typically positivist and postpositivist conceptualizations of what constitutes valid knowledge. I begin with a look at these philosophical underpinnings, as well as my own positionality as the researcher. This is followed by an examination of the research design, including selected research methods, participants and ethical considerations, leading into an examination of the data collection, analysis and interpretation, concluding with limitations of the study.

3.2 Philosophical Underpinnings

Critical, indigenous, feminist and decolonial theories view research as an inherently political act (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith 2014). All social research, in the words of Clough & Nutbrown (2002) "sets out with specific purposes from a particular position and aims to persuade readers of the significance of its claims; these claims are always broadly political" (p.4). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), the leading theorist on decolonization of Maori in New Zealand, takes this further, suggesting that the very project of conducting research is political; she states: the term "research" itself is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism (p.1).

In response, louder calls have emerged for a fundamental transformation of the nature of research to centre alternative perspectives and ways of knowing, to reset research agendas around issues that are important to those who have been pushed to the societal margins, and to research those issues collaboratively (Denzin et al., 2014; Edwards & Brannelly, 2017). As Crow (2012) puts it, "the democratisation of research has been identified as one of the key

methodological challenges of the 21st century". The ensuing shift of the social sciences toward more interpretive, postmodern, and critical practices and theorizing would be difficult to miss (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018). This study is therefore part of a growing body of literature (evidenced in the emergence and proliferation of indigenous epistemologies and methodologies), which aims to detach what counts as knowledge, its production and how it is used, from colonially dominant frameworks (Edwards & Brannelly, 2017). Always already political, these are relentlessly critical of transnational capitalism and its destructive presence in the indigenous world (Denzin et al., 2014). Moreover, such a project requires a critical reflection on the practices of research itself. As Lave & Wenger (1991) state: "the social scientist's practice must be analysed in the same historical, situated terms as any other practice under investigation" (p.51).

Such a critical approach has two major implications for this study, which are tied in with questions of validity. Firstly, we must let go of the false notion of objectivism in research, and recognize, as Bourdieu, (1977) suggests, the "objective limits of objectivism". As Bowden & Green (2010) demonstrate "subjectivity is the natural order in all research involving human participants" and therefore, "the notion of objectivity in any such research is a myth" (p.105). This is not to say that we should not try to minimize the impact of our biases on the study, but simply that a recognition of the researcher's role and stance in the research is essential. Significantly, Lawrence Stenhouse's (1981) definition of research as "systematic self-critical inquiry" (p.103) implies that research and self-critical inquiry are one and the same, they cannot be decoupled from one another. The danger in an objectivist approach to research would be to lose sight of the element of self-criticism that is so crucial for an understanding of the dynamics within the research being conducted, and its implications. Viewing the world as socially constituted, and the practice of research as inherently subjective and political, therefore requires that the study of social phenomena also be self-reflexive, and critical of the processes of research themselves.

The second implication is axiological. Richard Pring (2015) observes that dominant positivist methodologies bind the acquisition of knowledge around two kinds of verifiable propositions (empirical and logical/mathematical statements). By this token, he suggests, "statements about what is right and good and beautiful, or about what one ought to do, have no meaning" (Pring, 2015, p.112). Critical, decolonial, feminist and indigenous theories, in contrast, see the aims of research as necessarily value laden. As such, "critical qualitative research represents inquiry done for explicit political, utopian purposes, a politics of liberation,

a reflexive discourse constantly in search of an open-ended, subversive, multivoiced epistemology" (Denzin et al., 2014).

In her analogy between educational research and James Elroy Flecker's poem *The Gates of Damascus,* Sara Delamont (2005) suggests that we must take The Lebanon Gate, the gate of high risk but also of high reward, of uncertainty but also the greatest revelations, if we are to push the boundaries of educational research. Such a task is daunting, but also necessary if we are to challenge the *status quo* of research, and value the transformative power of indigenous, subjugated knowledges (Denzin et al., 2014). As Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2018, p.145) put it,

> We stand at the threshold of a history marked by multivocality, contested meanings, paradigmatic controversies, and new textual forms. At some distance down this conjectural path, when its story is Written, we will find that this has been the era of emancipation: emancipation from what Hannah Arendt calls "the coerciveness of Truth," emancipation from hearing only the voices of Western Europe, emancipation from generations of silence, and emancipation from seeing the world in one color.

It is within this spirit of critical, self-reflexive and emancipatory research that this study fits.

3.3 Positionality

While some have argued that only indigenous people should do indigenous research (see Smith, 1999, p.178), other voices have expounded the values of engaging in collaborative and constructive dialogue that goes beyond the boundaries of "us" and "them", or the misleading "insider"/"outsider" dichotomy. As (Rogoff, 2003) suggests, "to move our understanding of human development beyond assumptions and include the perspective of other communities, communication between community "insiders" and "outsiders" is essential" (p.25). Such dialogue also renders essential continual reflexivity–defined by Lincoln et al. (2018) as the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the "human as instrument". Sarah Ahmed (2017) points out that "when we have to think strategically, we also have to accept our complicity: we forgo any illusions of purity; we give up the safety of exteriority. If we are not exterior to the problem under investigation, we too are the problem under investigation" (p.94). As such, my positionality as the researcher necessitates reflection as it relates to two related and essential levels of the study, namely, my relationship with study participants, and my proximity to the context and content of the phenomena under investigation.

On the first level, the relationship between myself and my participants affects how the research topics and questions are approached, negotiated, and responded to (May, 2011).

Varying layers of my own identity thus affect the way participants relate to me and the study. For one, I write as an outsider to the indigenous colonized experience, and a privileged "Westerner" (Denzin et al., 2014). As a white woman, I was perceived as a *Mergi* (American, associated primarily with tourism), rather than a *Wagga* (Latina, more tied to the territory's colonial history). My foreignness also made me stand out, making unobtrusive observation more difficult, while conversely exempting me from some cultural norms and affording me the freedom to move around as I pleased. As a young woman, I was a non-threatening presence, and allowed to move in female circles and ask Guna women questions that would likely have been off-limits to a male researcher. My Spanish fluency became both a way "in", as I could communicate directly with any Spanish-speakers during interviews and in regular conversation, but also a mark of my outsider status, since I did not speak the indigenous language. This meant that, where interviews were conducted in *dulegaya* (the language spoken by the Gunas), it was more difficult to build rapport, and I relied on direct translation. The element of language was key to the investigation and brings me to an examination of my own familiarity (or lack thereof) with the culture and context being studied.

Richard Pring (2015) suggests that "to understand particular events one must see things from the point of view of the participants or of the people who are involved — how they interpret events and thereby constitute those events as events of a certain sort" (p.120). Such a task was made inherently more difficult by my externality to the community and the culture and practices being studied. This meant that I had to ask questions and dwell on topics that may have been obvious to a Guna person. Conversely, my lack of familiarity with the local context led me to examine assumptions that may be taken for granted by members of the community, and my knowledge of the subject allowed me to make connections which would not otherwise be obvious.

The language dynamic especially posed some challenges and advantages. On the one hand, it required that I have someone translate for me from Guna to Spanish, this meant additional time for interviews and made it more challenging to actively reflect back on what was being said, or pick up on subtexts, cultural non-verbal gestures (May, 2011), or identify key aspects to be expanded on in the moment. On the other hand, my lack of understanding of the language made me more of a "fly on the wall" because people would talk openly in their language, knowing I would not understand, and I could observe, or it would be translated for me. In many cases, it also made people more willing to explain unfamiliar elements, concepts or words to me, eliciting further, more detailed and informative explanations. Issues of

unfamiliarity with the local culture and language were especially mitigated by the participation of key collaborators in the research (explored more in-depth later on), and by my living in the community during the study period.

3.4 Methods Used

In order to explore the cultural processes of learning within the community, I relied primarily on observation and interviews (including fieldnotes and informal conversations). The degree of structure for both of these methods was a balancing act between gathering targeted and relevant information, while also having the flexibility to respond to the circumstances and context. The types of interview questions that I prepared were modelled after effective studies in the literature that engaged with similar work. However, because no similar study has been done in the context studied here, a set structure was not adhered to. Preliminary preparation was done in collaboration with one key participant in order to gain some fundamental knowledge prior to the study period thus maximizing efficiency in the field and being more culturally attuned. At the same time, a more unstructured approach allowed me to focus on the specifics, gain internal validity and contextual understanding of the phenomena being studied (Maxwell, 2005). This looser structure is particularly useful for understanding processes that lead to specific outcomes in a particular setting, or what Miles and Huberman (1994) called "local causality", which is crucial to the study at hand.

3.4.1 Observation

Mack et al. (2005) suggest that "there is no substitute for witnessing or participating in phenomena of human interaction" (p.14). My presence in the community allowed me to gain a vast array of contextual knowledge that would have otherwise been impossible to capture. Participant observation (along with informal conversations and participation in daily living and communal activities) was crucial to my overall understanding of the situation and helped inform the interviews conducted. The method comes with its own set of advantages and concerns. One advantage of observing is that it takes place in the space of the participant, rather than that of the researcher, allowing participants to be more at ease in their own environment, and affording the researcher glimpses of a more naturally occurring reality (Mack et al., 2005, p.13). Conversely, it can become difficult to observe without being noticed and, therefore, there is a danger of the observed activity taking on a performative quality. Yet, as Pring (2015)

observes, where the social setting being investigated is well established and rooted in local traditions, these are not easily shifted by a stranger in their midst. More limitingly for the objective of this study, observation in one given moment is unable to capture changing processes over time. This brings us to the need for interviews.

3.4.2 Interviews

While observation provides a powerful way of learning about people's behaviour and the context in which this occurs, interviewing can provide valuable description of actions and events, which took place in the past or for which we cannot gain observational access (Maxwell, 2005). Interviews therefore especially get at the historicity of learning processes studied here. Moreover, interviews help gain in-depth and complex textual descriptions of human experience, with all their nuance and contradictions getting at intangible factors, such as social norms or gender roles (Mack et al., 2005). The open-ended nature of the semi-structured interviews allowed me to probe beyond some of the answers provided and enter into a dialogue with some interviewees (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Where more unstructured interviews or informal conversations were used, participants were able to take the conversation in the direction they saw fit, answer questions within their own frame of reference, thus allowing them to prioritize information they thought more relevant and revealing something about their forms of understanding and constructing meaning (May, 2011). This gets at the interpretive perspectives of interviewees (i.e. the connections and relationships a person sees between particular events, phenomena, and beliefs). On the one hand, this interpretivism may be labelled participant bias, and some have argued that researchers must therefore be careful with taking interviews alone as “truth” (Walford, 2001). On the other, data derived from interview are not simply ‘accurate’ or ‘distorted’ pieces of information, but provide the researcher with a means of analysing the ways in which people consider events and relationships and the reasons they offer for doing so (May, 2011, p.159). As such, interviews are a valuable method to reveal the depth and historicity of people’s experience but cannot be taken as an ultimate objective truth.

3.5 Participants

Purposeful selection was used to recruit participants who could provide information not attained as well from other sources (Maxwell, 2005). The first goal of such selection was to

achieve representativeness or typicality of the range of individuals selected. Therefore, women were prioritized because theirs was the lived experience examined primarily. The aim was also to adequately capture the heterogeneity in the population; therefore, women of varying ages and generations were interviewed. Engaging with several generations helped get at the historical processes and transformations involved in the study. Where men were interviewed, it was mostly in regard to elements of the study that the women would or could not tell me more about. These men were all older and knowledgeable in their own fields of expertise; they included a retired schoolteacher, the spiritual leaders (*saglas*) of the community, a local poet, and a music *maestro*. Other conversations occurred more organically, including with a few young men whose perspectives added to the broader picture due to the nature of the research as the study of situated cultural practice. Participant selection was limited by time, resources, and by the geographic space (the island) I was on. Conversely, within the setting available, finding participants was not difficult, in large part due to their familiarity with one of my collaborators, as well as to the hospitable nature that is characteristic of Guna culture.

As previously noted, research relationships are crucial because they can facilitate or hinder other components of the research design, such as participant selection and data collection (Maxwell, 2005). In part for this reason, and in a far deeper sense, the participation of two collaborators was crucial to the study. Jocabed Miselis Solano, a young Guna woman who grew up in a Guna community in Panama City and maintains close ties with the islands was involved in the study from the outset (Pain, 2004). Her own work with the Guna community and other indigenous populations meant that she possessed crucial "insider" knowledge and could help guide the study in the direction of concerns expressed by the Guna people themselves (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Denzin et al., 2014). Her involvement also made a kind of "trial period" possible to refine the interview tools, allowing for greater sensitivity when eliciting from others later in the study (Petrie, Fiorelli, & O'Donnell, 2006). Moreover, her involvement, and that of my second collaborator (a young Guna man from the community of *Digir*, and our host for the time) during the study period in Gunayala, facilitated relationships with other participants and provided insight, interpretation and translation that were crucial to the study. While such an approach was informed by principals of Participatory Research, which Reason & Bradbury, (2008) describe as "an orientation to inquiry", a way of doing research largely *for* and *with* people who have been considered voiceless or powerless in research (Nind, 2011), it ultimately opted for a collaborative approach that was more appropriate to the study.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines set out by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC), and procedures approved by the same (ED-CIA-20-086) were adhered to throughout the research process. This included being explicit with participants about the aims of the research, and their roles within it. Written information and consent forms (translated into Spanish, see Appendix D) were prepared for participants, though in every case, participants preferred to give informed audio consent instead. In these cases, it was made clear to participants that they had the right to revoke their consent at any moment before, during or after the interviews (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Weiss, 1994). Study documents and personal information (of which only names were collected and pseudonymized) were stored physically in a safe place to ensure participant anonymity and confidentiality per ethical codes of conduct in educational research (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p.47). Electronic documents and audio recordings were saved on a password encrypted computer and backed up on the University of Oxford's secured Nexus365 software. No monetary compensation was made to participants, though in the case of my collaborators, contributed to their transportation and food were made as a token of my deep appreciation.

Moreover, research ethics for indigenous communities "extend far beyond issues of individual consent and confidentiality" (Smith, 1999, p.119). In line with culturally responsive research practices, then, what is acceptable and not acceptable research is determined and defined from within the community (Denzin et al., 2014). Therefore, beyond CUREC approved guidelines, the community's own local regulations, expectations and ethical concerns were abided by. For this, a research proposal was sent to the General Congress for approval, (Congresos Generales de Gunayala, 2013). Upon arrival for fieldwork, written permission was also received from the community's *Sagla*, the authoritative spokesperson for the community (see Appendix C). Cultural norms were also observed, with guidance from my collaborators.

3.7 Data collection

In the words of Alice Oancea (2016), "data collection is not a means separate from the ends of research, but part of the praxis of research, whereby the aims are expressed and challenged in action" (p.112). Data collection began with informal conversations with my primary collaborator to define the topic of investigation. Questions were developed based on the theoretical framework used, and then narrowed further and piloted with Jocabed. Within

the community, interviews were conducted in a space of the participants choosing (often outside their houses or in a communal area), and according to their schedule. The option was given each participant whether they preferred to conduct the interview in Spanish, in which case the questions were asked by myself, or in Guna, in which case questions were translated by either of my collaborators and responses were interpreted back. Participant quotes in the findings are therefore quotes of the translations given in the moment by my collaborators. Informal, open conversations occurred naturally by virtue of living in the community throughout the study period. Several of the most insightful revelations were gained in this way. Participant observation was done as a matter of course, and constantly recorded. Triangulation was made possible from data gathered through observation, interviews, and informal conversations and fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001). Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and extensive fieldnotes provided a record of observations and informal conversations.

3.8 Data analysis

In its simplest form, data analysis is understood as "the processing of data in order to answer the research questions" (Boeije, 2010, p.75). While such a process is often separated conceptually from research design (design being what happens before data collection, and analysis what happens after) (Maxwell, 2005, p.95), here I treat data analysis as part of design in line with Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p.6). In this sense, data analysis was conducted throughout the study period. While in the field, I replayed interviews for myself, taking notes and memos (Maxwell, 2005, p.96). Constant dialogue was maintained with collaborators and members of the community, whose feedback helped clarify, expand and validate data. Such respondent validation, or member checks (Bryman, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which occurred during data collection and continued throughout the analysis and write-up phase, helped ensure that data was not misinterpreted. While it is understood that participants' feedback is no more inherently valid than their interview responses; it was taken simply as evidence regarding the validity of their account (Maxwell, 2005, p.111). Upon completion of data collection, interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed in Spanish. Translation from Guna to Spanish occurred throughout the course of data collection mostly by my collaborators, as indicated above. In some instances, a Guna-Spanish dictionary (Orán & Wagua, 2011) was consulted, and accuracy of translation was confirmed with Jocabed. Translations from Spanish to English (my own) occurred during the write-up phase to conserve the original meanings and

subtexts as much as possible. The narratives referenced were interpreted and compiled from the oral primarily by Aiban Wagua, a Guna scholar, poet and educationalist.[2] These were used as primary sources for analysis as they helped elucidate or expand on interview responses.

After transcription, the data was read and re-read (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Notes were taken, and overarching patterns were highlighted. Thematic analysis was then employed, fracturing the data into thematic categories that could be examined separately. Overarching organizational categories, or "topics" (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001) that were established prior to data collection became useful "bins" for sorting the data later on. Substantive categories were developed through inductive (emic) analysis: looking at the data at hand, and seeing what themes emerged from the participants 'contributions. At the same time, a more theoretical and deductive (etic) approach was taken which helped connect the data at hand with the existing theoretical framework (Maxwell, 2005). Finally, mind maps were drawn, and narrative analysis was used to find connections between statements and events, in order to see how the different aspects of the research question are related, and thus create a more coherent picture from the data.

3.9 Limitations

Certain limitations of the study should be taken into account as they relate to the validity of the study. Firstly, the amount of time available to do fieldwork may have been a barrier to a more exhaustive study of the topic (Mack et al., 2005; Maxwell, 2005; May, 2011). While a full week was used to collect data, the study was cut short due to the worsening Covid-19 pandemic, which made it impossible for fieldwork to continue in the interest of safety for all those involved. Similarly, the study was limited to only one of the many islands in Gunayala, in part due to access (my collaborators were connected with the island *Digir*, which is where the study was conducted). Another reason for this limitation was that, while we planned to visit other islands to attain a broader participant base, we were inhibited from doing so by high water levels and dangerous seas (for which the Guna governing body placed a temporary ban on all sea travel). Finally, the language barrier, while largely mitigated by the participation of my

[2] Under Aiban Wagua's technical directorship several pieces were published online and in print as part of a joint initiative to make Guna education bilingual and intercultural (EBI, see Appendix A). Though his is the name on many of these works, the studies were done in collaboration with the EBI team. Other literature on the context, history and culture of Gunayala exists in the archives at the Universities of Panama and Antioquia (Colombia), but online access is very limited.

collaborators, may have limited my ability to engage with the material more fully. These limitations being noted, the study provided a great opportunity to examine learning in a new context.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this investigation was to unpack how Guna girl's and women's learning is mediated through their participation in shared practice. More specifically, it examines how learning occurs through participation in sociocultural activity, which brings about processes of transformation (becoming and belonging) of Guna women in the community. It is premised on the understanding that cultural dynamics within indigenous communities produce many ingrained processes of learning that are crucial for its reproduction, such as how to cultivate and care for the land, how to prepare and preserve food, how to build a home, and how to elaborate artistic expressions and artefacts, among others (Álvarez, 2018, p.27). As children participate in the practice of daily life, framed and guided by mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, ancestors, they become enculturated into an understanding of how to be and live in the world. Human learning and development are therefore understood, in line with Rogoff (2003), as "a process in which people transform through their ongoing participation in cultural activities, which in turn contribute to changes in their cultural communities across generations (p.37).

It is argued that learning results from participation in sociocultural activities within a community. Through **participation**, children learn to a) **become** independent (agentic and thinking human beings) and interdependent (guided by the scaffolding of others, which is developed in the process of shared work and cultural traditions), and b) learn to **belong** to a community (which itself is reproduced and transformed through shared participation and learning).

This section is structured into four main sections. The first analyses how women in Gunayala participate in a community of practice (that of women who sew molas). The second explores how Guna girls become women, or how their transition to womanhood and "legitimate participation" is shaped by this shared practice and the cultural system of oral signification and valuation. The third section unpacks how such participation constitutes Guna women's identity and understanding of how to be and belong within the broader structure of their community and the natural world.

4.2 Participation

As we sit interviewing Florinda outside her home, her seven-year-old granddaughter sews her *ute-ute*[3] on a small square of cloth. At regular intervals she checks in with her grandmother for confirmation that she is doing it right. Flor, without pausing her response to our question, examines the girl's work and nods. The girl keeps sewing for a few minutes longer before running off to play, depositing her handiwork in her grandmother's lap. Flor notices that the girl has accidentally sewn the wrong ends of the cloth together and begins to unravel the stitching.

- "Grandma, what are you doing? I was sewing!" grumbles the girl upon her return, at finding the fruit of her labour undone.
- "I am helping you fix it" Flor responds as she shows her how she is disentangling the cloth so her granddaughter can continue sewing. The girl then sits back down to work: "like this, how you were doing, that's how I should do it, like this?"



Figure 2. The younger girl sews independently under Flor's supervision.

In the meantime, the girl's younger sister, also beginning to learn, comes to grandma with her own scraps of cloth. Grandma sews the first stitches to fix the two squares of cloth together, threads the needle for the little one, and then has her sit to work independently as Flor continues our conversation.

This scene demonstrates the fundamental importance of children's ongoing participation in cultural activities for their learning and development in social communities. It is one of several similar such scenes occurring on a daily basis which provide opportunities for learning in every-day practice. Lave & Wenger

[3] A basic stitching pattern that is taught to girls at the early stages of learning how to make a mola

(1991) suggest that "children are quite essentially legitimate peripheral participants in adult social worlds" (p.32). As newcomers to such a world, children are expected to move towards full participation in the sociocultural practices of their community. In Gunayala, children are viewed as apprentices as well as children. Traditionally, a girl or boy will accompany their parents in their daily tasks, from which vantage point they begin to observe and, little by little, take part in their parent's activities according to their capacity (Álvarez, 2018). The mastery of new knowledge and skills is constitutive of that participation, and a result of it. In learning to sew molas, Guna girls move towards full participation within the community of practice of mola-makers from older generations, thus building their identity as Guna women. Through participation, children play central roles along with their elders and other companions, in learning and extending the ways of their communities (Rogoff, 2003, p.285). The importance of participation for learning, and the processes through which it occurs among Guna girls are explored in this section.

4.2.1 Guided Participation

The scene with Flor and her grand-daughters elucidates the significance of guided participation in what Vygotsky coined the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in which children learn through interactions with more experienced adults and peers, who assist them in engaging in thinking that is beyond the "zone" in which they would be able to perform without assistance (Rogoff, 2003, p.282). Lave and Wenger's (1991) Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP), or Rogoff's (2003) guided participation provide an analytical framework to understand the varied ways in which children learn as they participate in, and are guided by, the values and practices of their cultural communities.

For Guna girls this process begins in the family, where (as in the case of Flor), the role of the "master" is played by the girl's close female relatives. In most cases, this would be the mother, but in her absence, is replaced by a grandmother, aunt or other female close of kin. One interviewee, Laura, states: "each family is dedicated to teaching their daughters. It's something very familial". In the case of another participant, whose mother died when she was less than a year old, the process of learning to sew started later than most (at age 25). Similarly, Guna women who grow up in Panama City tend to be more isolated from community practice and therefore less likely to learn to sew molas. This demonstrates the importance of immediate access to guidance or "old-timers" for participation, initially through observation and modelling (Gregory et al., 2010), and therefore for learning to occur.

Learning also transpires outside a simple teacher-learner dyad. In many cases, the ZPD encompasses learning in relation to more experienced peers, in this case usually sisters. For instance, though still learning herself, the seven-year-old in the scene above would sometimes assist her younger sister to learn elements which the elder girl already knew. Another interviewee, Elda, suggested that she would actually help her elder sister with the "creativity" of her molas, because even though the older sister learned first, the younger had a better eye for the colours and designs.

Crucially, moreover, women's learning is rooted in their cosmology. The *Gunadule* consider the world of nature their teacher. For them, humans are all part of one large cosmic family because we are all sons and daughters of our mother earth (*Nabgwana*), (Martínez, 2012). To their eyes, and in their language, the ocean is grandmother, and the trees are our older sisters. From this deep familial relationship, and their interdependency with it, comes their respect for the natural world. This is also reflected in the way Guna women learn how to make their molas. In the same way that some women learned to make molas from their close relatives, it is said that our older sisters, the trees, had many beautiful designs on their trunk, and when women approached them, the trees would teach them how to turn these into beautiful designs for their molas.[4] In this way, women learn by engaging with each other and the world around them.

4.2.2 Unguided Participation

Significantly, learning does not necessarily rely on explicit instruction. The emphasis is on learning more so than on teaching. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning can take place where there is teaching, but intentional instruction itself is not the source or cause of learning (p.40). In the case above, Flor does not direct the girls to do something specific. In fact, much of the instruction is done non-verbally, and relies on the girls' ability to observe what is being done and then imitate it. Further, opportunities for children to observe are created in the daily practice of the community. As Jocabed states, "many women sew as they listen to the *Sagla* in the House of Congress, or at meetings, in any place". In this way, girls have access to many interrelated aspects of adult life, and they learn from the opportunities to observe presented naturally (Rogoff, 1981). Rogoff suggests that in such communities, "children take a leading role in managing their own attention, motivation, and involvement in learning,

[4] See the narrative of Olonagegiryai (Martínez, 2012; Wagua, 2014)

through their observation and participation in ongoing mature activities" (Rogoff, 2003, p.301). In this case, observation is both a form of participation, and a crucial first step for the continuation of the same.

Similarly, play becomes another way in which girls begin to participate in, and familiarize themselves with, the community's practice. As Vera and Souberman (1978) put it, "play is in advance of development, for in this manner children begin to acquire the motivation, skills, and attitudes necessary for their social participation, which can be fully achieved only with the assistance of their peers and elders (p.129). One interviewee (Susi) explained to me how her mother began teaching her to sew: "First she gave me a match, a little stick. She tied a string to it and handed it to me. She still didn't give me the needle". Laughing she added "I tried to sew with the match, but I couldn't". Play here creates its own ZPD. As Vygotsky (1978) suggests, "in play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself" (p.102). Thus, through play, Guna girls work out the "scripts" of everyday life (Goodwin, 1990; Piaget, 2014; Rogoff, 1981, 2003). By "playing at mola" the girls perform the skills and roles that they see other women take on, and implicitly engage with the community's values and beliefs. Similarly, Kress (1997) argues that participation in play allows children to use artefacts in imaginatively new ways, creating their own system of meaning or semiotics, through which they can access a broader field of learning. In this way, play allows Guna girls to draw nearer to, and take ownership of, the meaning-making practice in which they begin to participate.



Figure 3. Opportunities to observe practice are created in daily activity

A third way in which Guna woman learn in the absence of explicit instruction is through participation in their internal landscapes, through dreams. Dreams are deeply imbedded in the Guna culture. So much so that when people greet one another in the morning, rather than saying

"good morning" or "how did you sleep?" they often ask, "what did you dream?" This is substantiated in one Guna narrative in which Ibeorgun[5] reminds the people that "sleep is a brief death to regain one's strength, Nana wishes to continue guiding us in our dreams. Remember your dreams well". It is in dreams that some women say they learn special skills. For instance, Jocabed recalled how her grandmother dreamt that several women appeared to her and said: "today we are going to teach you the art of sewing the mola, and you will learn designs others do not know". The next day: "they wake up and make designs they didn't previously know". More recent studies on the effects of sleep and dreaming on cognition and memory reveal that these play a key role in how we classify, store and access information (see Dehart, 2010; Mallon, 2002; Stickgold et al., 2001; Wagner et al., 2004). In this way, dreams are a way that Guna women learn by engaging with their own thoughts and spiritually with others.

4.2.3 Structure of Participation

Thus far, I have explored the ways that learners begin to familiarize themselves with and participate in the practice of sewing molas. Such processes point to a richly diverse field of essential actors and forms of relationships outside of a teacher-learner dyad, which are supported by the every-day cultural practices of the community. As such, the processes of learning that occur are relatively informal and, significantly, depend on the agency of the learner who often determines the degree and pace of participation. When a girl begins to learn, says Laura, "it is not something rigid. A girl can be sewing and then leave it to play, she comes back and sews her mola again. That mola can take up to a year. Because it's not a matter of her finishing it, it's a matter of the girl learning, but learning at her own pace. There isn't a rigid time". Moreover, the emphasis is on learning rather than on the final product. In the scene above, Flor guides the girls at their work, but the engagement is initiated by them, and the pace of participation is based on the girl's own choice and motivation.

This is not to say that there is no structure involved in learning to sew molas. Bourdieu (1977) states that "every society provides for structural exercises tending to transmit this or that form of practical mastery" (p.88). These can vary from "simple familiarization, in which the apprentice insensibly and unconsciously acquires the principles of the "art" and the art of living" to the other extreme which relies on "explicit and express transmission by precept and

[5] Brother of Giggardiryai, who, in the narrative came together to teach the Guna people how to live in community (Wagua, 2011a)

prescription" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.88). Until now, I have explored ways in which Guna girls learn primarily in regard to the former. On the other hand, while express transmission is less emphasized, some degree of instruction is employed. In fact, all the women I interviewed outlined a similar process of how they learned (and taught) to fabricate the mola. These processes are similar to those of weaving in Mexico and among the Mayas in Guatemala, as well as tailoring in Liberia (Lave & Rogoff, 1984). Such processes rely on the segmentation of steps, guidance in the context of joint participation, and adjusted levels of participation according to the learner's increasing skill and interest (Rogoff, 2003). Significantly, this learning is a dialectical process. As the woman learns to make the mola, the artefact itself is transformed, facilitating action that could not have occurred without the new "mediational means", hence altering the flow of mental functions (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1993, 1998). In this way, as a Guna girl learns to sew in the inverse order, as it were, of how the mola is ultimately made, new forms of learning are enabled.

To make a mola, one must begin with the design, which is then cut out and lastly sewn. However, in learning, the first step is to master the ability to sew, and the last is to make the design. This "learning curriculum" allows girls to participate in "less intense, less complex, less vital tasks", and then build towards "more central aspects of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.96). At the early stages, the mother, grandmother or aunt, cuts one small square of cloth and a simple geometric design on another cloth. She then sews these together loosely to hold them in place, and, particularly if the girl is very young, threads the needle for her (as Flor did for her younger granddaughter). The girl's task is therefore made simple: "with the needle, just follow the outline of the design as best you can" (Susi). Girls begin doing so roughly with a stitching called *ute-ute*, which is visible on the cloth and would be unacceptable at later stages. The girl is not expected to sew well from the beginning, but "they start learning with trial and error, while grandma or mother look on". In some cases, like that of Flor, the elder will "undo some



Figure 4. A Mola in partial stages of completion.

of the stitching and make it better. Because in the end, they want the mola to be usable. The adults correct them as they go… but the idea is that the girls do it themselves, and the women just help them" (Laura). In this way, girls are given the opportunity to practice with minimal consequences for making an error. As they advance (and develop physically), they improve their technical mastery of the sewing, and begin to learn how to cut certain shapes to make more layers, to choose the colours, and ultimately to draw the design. Thus, "each step offers the unstated opportunity to consider how the previous step contributes to the present one" (Lave, 1988, p.4), providing the girl with a fuller understanding of the practice. Similarly, in practice they are made to understand that cosmologically, their participation as an individual learner is one "step" between the work of those women who have come before and a contribution to those who will come after.

4.2.4 Full Participation

The development of knowledgeably skilled identities, or mastery, comes as a result of full participation in the practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). According to several of the women's testimonials, it takes Guna girls an average of three years to learn to make their first full mola. But the learning does not end there: "the learning is constant", and varying degrees of mastery are achieved along the way. These are identified by a number of traits in a girl or woman's mola, including: the fineness and neatness of the stitches, the amount or quality of detail in the stitching and embroidery, the number of cloth layers, the complexity of the design, and the overall aesthetic. These signs also determine when a girl is ready to move on to new levels of learning: "we know when we look if it's well sewn. If so, the girl knows a lot and she can advance. If it doesn't look good, she stays on the same task". In this way, rather than advancement being based on age, it is determined by the girl's demonstrated progress.

Some women never learn beyond sewing or do so at a later age. Benni, for instance, already a mother, admits that "when they put all the colours like that, I still don't know. They still place them for me, and all I do is sew". This is particularly common among women, like herself, who spend a larger portion of their upbringing outside of the island community, in Panama City. Those who are able to make mola designs, most commonly from older generations, like Flor, are asked by younger women to make them ancestral designs to wear for special occasions. And yet, Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that learning only partly implies the capacity to perform new tasks or activities. Rather these are part of a broader system of relations in which they have meaning. Because the person both defines and is defined by these relations, learning

implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The mastery of sewing molas, through ever-more skilled and complex participation, therefore, carries significance as it relates to Guna girls' *becoming* and *belonging* within the community's broader system of social relations.

4.3 Become

Learning as a process of transformation implies experiencing transitions in relation to the activity, values and worldview of the community. For Guna girls, the process of *becoming* a woman and a full participant in the community is tied in with the ability to participate in shared practice (that of making molas), but also of understanding the significance and value of that practice. For the Gunadule, this belief system is established, transmitted, and learned orally, through their *cantos* (songs, narratives).

4.3.1 The Social Significance of the Mola

"The Guna nation is a people of poets. Life itself is lived through narrative and poetry. Full of colour, images, symbolism, contrast, imagination, magic, astonishment, perplexity, hiddenness, mystery, feeling…they evoke songs which are sung from generation to generation through time" (Miselis Solano, 2020).

One such narrative tells of two wise siblings, Giggardiryai and her brother Ibeorgun, who came to earth to teach the people how best to live in communion with one another and the world around them. Ibeorgun taught how to cultivate the land, and to build a house. At the same time, Giggardiryai taught the women how to sew molas, weave hammocks, elaborate other forms of art, and how to live in community. Giggardiryai opened the first school where the grandmothers learned to weave and mould clay: they would distribute themselves into groups, each group directed by one who knew more, all overseen and directed by *nana* Giggardiryai. She counselled the women saying "we are the delicately strong hand of this *Nabwagna* (mother earth). We are not inferior to the men, we are equals, and together we can do great things".[6]

[6] A full retelling of this narrative can be found in Wagua (2011a). It should be noted, however, in line with Wagua (2011a), that passing a text from Guna to Spanish (particularly in the case of oral narratives) is more an act of interpretation, approximation and analogy, than one of translation.

So goes a fragment of the story about how Guna women first learned not only to sew their molas but also how to live and act in the world. Such narratives passed down orally from generation to generation form a crucial part of the learning of the community. Becoming a full member of society, a "Legitimate Participant", requires more than just the ability or knowledge of a practice (in this case that of mola-making). In other words, knowing how to make a mola does not necessarily mean that one understands the philosophy at its root. One interviewee posited that, if a woman simply wears the mola without knowing its origin, it loses its significance. Jocabed also suggests that, in fact, many women can sew, but some may not share verbally the depth of the narrative behind the act. She clarifies that this is often not because they do not know the narratives, or the reasons they do what they do, but that they may not express that knowing in a way that is accessible to an interviewer. She states:

> Our culture is not one of saying everything we are thinking […] so when a woman responds by saying 'I don't know', it might be because she is shy or does not know how to express in words what she has already expressed through her art. What Guna women know they express from a different epistemology, through their senses and their art, and not necessarily through orality in the mode that we expect.

In this way, it is recognized that the interview tools may be limited in capturing the extent of a woman's knowledge. At the same time this helps reveal how much the practice of making molas is deeply rooted in a broader system of beliefs that give the practice meaning. Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to the way in which using artefacts and understanding their significance interact to become one learning process as "transparency". For the Gunadule, transparency relies deeply on the oral transmission of their system of beliefs based on the *Babigala* (or Bad Igala, the way of God), which translates into their way of behaving or living (*anmar daet*). The mola in this way is a "school of every-day life" through which much more than the practice of sewing is taught and learned.

4.3.2 The Culture of Orality

As demonstrated before, women learn the practice of sewing molas by progressive (un)guided participation in the Community of Practice. Yet, it is by listening to the narratives sung by the *Saglas* (Guna leaders) at congressional meetings two or three times per week, that they become enculturated into the broader practice of the community and thus learn to become both independent as women and interdependent within shared cultural values and labour systems. The story of Giggardiryai is but one of many narratives (and not even the most frequently told) from the *babigala* that transmit the ancestral beliefs and knowledge of the

Gunadule across generations. Collectively and through continual exposure, these stories "seep into the consciousness of the people, sometimes without them even realizing it". A deeper look into the culture of orality is therefore merited.

The *saglagan* (*saglas*, authorities who remember, teach and sing the texts of the babigala) make up their own Community of Practice. The language in the narratives is complex and impregnated with figures, metaphors and symbolisms which render them almost impenetrable, and make it necessary for the *argan* to interpret the message of the text so the people can understand (Wagua, 2011a). The ability to memorize, understand and transmit the learning from these texts takes the *Saglas* a lifetime of study at the foot of a more experienced master. The First *Sagla* of the community of *Digir* recalled that in the past, everything was learned orally, and they often had to take "medicines" to enhance their capacity to memorize. "Now, there are written works, books and cell phones which help," he added. Elda also explains that among the *Saglas* from different communities, there is some exchange: "every time that a *Sagla* comes to the community, they are invited to sing… they are special invitees to teach the community". In this way, the teaching of the community is a collective act, both between the people of the community (men and women, leader and family) and with those of previous generations. As Miselis Solano (2020) puts it, "the narrator becomes united with the one who originally narrated it and the listener dialogues with the one who narrates. This permits us to connect directly with our grandmothers and grandfathers".



Figure 4. Flor sings a fragment of a lullaby while her granddaughters sew.

Carvajal and Aguilar (2012) describe the language of these narratives as "a language that doubts, in which each word is a text, and its narratives produce a multiplicity of meanings which lead, on one hand, to the events narrated in the origin stories, and, on the other, to reflexion

about our place in the universe and the forms of relating amongst ourselves and with diverse beings in nature" (p.43). As such, these narratives transmit the shared values that lay down how one should behave independently and interdependently. These transmissions, moreover, are integrated in the every-day learning of the community: "we know these narratives because since we were young, our fathers, mother, grandmothers, grandfathers, would sing them, whether at work, in the House of Congress, or simply before going to bed" (Wagua, 2018). Through song, especially the *cantos de arrullo* (lullabies) children begin to acquire from an early age an understanding of collective work, solidarity, cooperation. These are typically sung by mothers, aunts, grandmas, sisters, and the contents vary by the gender of the child to whom they are singing (Wagua, 2014). Flor is one of the last women from the community of *Digir* who still knows these songs and sings them to her granddaughters. She sang a song of counsel for girls: of the birth of a girl, her role and responsibility as she grows older, the importance of her learning to sew the mola, the way she should behave (see Figure 4.). We recorded a fragment of her song, which other women of the community then requested to hear. Upon listening to the recording, one woman reflected on the importance of hearing these ancestral songs for the development of young girls' and boys' conscience, lamenting that when Flor dies, there will be no one left to continue teaching in this way.

4.3.3 Becoming by Combining Orality and Praxis

The importance of the narratives and lullabies rests not simply in the words, but in their power to counsel, advise, and teach the new generation the ways of being Gunadule. Sagla Olonagdiginya states: "we are aware that without the foundation of the babigala, our children will not be Gunas, even though they look like Gunas" (Arias, 2000). Becoming Gunadule therefore relies on the joining of both narrative and praxis.

For Guna women, the practice of sewing the mola is intimately tied in with their transition to womanhood (both biologically, and socially), as sung in Flor's lullaby. Typically, girls begin to learn how to sew between the ages of 8 and 12 so that by the time they reach puberty, they are able to make their own mola. In this learning process through participation, the girl's perception of her own identity evolves. Susana suggested that girls start learning how to sew as if they are playing (in jest), but then they realize it is important, because they have to wear it for the ceremony. It is then, when a girl reaches puberty, that initiation rites are held for her, at which she wears her own mola: "they cut her hair, paint her entire body black, it's a ceremony of our grandmothers. They teach girls about the adult life of a woman". Therefore,

simultaneously to their learning the practice of sewing, girls are being enculturated into the norms of society by the narratives and other integrated cultural activities (such as music, dance, ceremonies, rituals) of their community. In this way, increased participation in the practice of mola-making and the practice of oral enculturation together are crucial parts of becoming a Guna woman.

4.3.4 Becoming a Guna Woman

4.3.4.1 Interdependent

The cultural structure of social practice determines what spaces a Guna woman is expected to participate in and occupy. There are roles that both men and women can take up. For instance, becoming an *Inadule* (healer), or a *Nele* (wise person, seer) or helping to work the land. Similarly, in the narratives and in their constitution, Guna women can become political leaders (*Saglas*) as well as the men. In more recent years, some of these roles have become more male-dominated, in part due to Western influences, and in part because women have taken up more of the responsibilities in the home. At the same time, there are roles that are exclusively carried out by women, such as that of mola artisans, of midwives, keepers of the rites of puberty, among others. Becoming a Guna woman entails participating in and learning, at least some, if not all, of those practices.

Interestingly, one interviewee, Cindy (born Samuel), "a man who wants to be a woman" and who identifies as "gay" (because the concept of "trans" is not familiar in the community) was taught by her mother to make molas when it became clear that she "was not like other men". She expressed pride in her ability to sew and suggested that the men respected her more when she wore her molas. In the community it is acceptable, and even desirable, for a man to be "gay", because the female role is an important one in the community, though mentalities have shifted somewhat due to Western influence. Still, for Guna women including Cindy, learning to make molas is both a step towards becoming a woman, and a constitutive part of womanhood.

These gender roles are rooted in the spirituality, the narratives and the worldview of the Gunadule. Outwardly, "Gunayala is perceived as matrilocal", Jocabed explained, "that is to say, the role of the woman is very strong". Then she adds "but so is that of the man". The concepts of matriarchy and patriarchy are foreign to the Guna. To them, the female and male roles are different, but equally strong in order for there to be balance. Moreover, in the Guna

spirituality, God is conceived of as mother and father: “it is understood that the great supreme, the great goddess is both female and male at once. There is no question of superiority, because balance is achieved in the duality”. This is illustrated further in the narrative above, wherein Nana Giggardiryai tells the women: “we are the delicately strong hand of this Nabwagna (mother earth). We are not inferior to the men, we are equals, and together we can do great things”. The emphasis here is on that neither men nor women (and thus the roles they embody) can thrive without the other. Such collective interdependence rests at the heart of their worldview.

4.3.4.2 Independent

Fundamentally, with the increasing commercialization of molas and other artisanal objects from the Guna community, learning how to make molas also becomes a significant factor in the production and reproduction of the self and the society, as women gain financial independence. Starting around the 1980s, molas became a significant source of income for Guna women (MUMO, 2020). According to a 2016 UNDP study, 75.8% of women in Gunayala are dedicated to artisanal work (UNDP, 2016). Most of this is through the making and selling of molas. Moreover, legally, molas are the collective and intellectual property of the Guna people (Congresos Generales de Gunayala, 2013, p.33), making it possible for women to sell their hand-made artwork without being massively threatened by the global economy.

Though some women only sell a few molas to have a little money to supplement their family’s needs (the most quoted need being to pay for their children’s school tuition or materials), others rely on their art more heavily. Susana, for instance, made reference to her identity as a woman and a mother being tied with her ability to feed her daughters and put them through school, which she did with the proceeds from the molas she sewed and sold. As a single mother, this was her only form of income, and she highlighted the importance of passing that skill down to her daughters so they too would never lack a means of living. This skill is therefore a crucial element for the independent sustenance of Guna women, and also for the community as a whole. In this sense, as individuals contribute to an activity system, they contribute to the reproduction of society as a whole (Engeström et al., 1999; Wolff-Michael & Lee, 2007). Therefore, learning to sew molas is an important component of how Guna girls become in(ter)dependent women (with all the roles and responsibilities that this entails) both in a sociocultural and an economic sense. As they do so, they are simultaneously transformed

by and transform the community of practice in which they operate, gaining a sense of belonging within the broader framework of society.

4.4 Be(long)

Belonging comes as a result of melding knowledge of the practice (both the capacity to sew and knowledge of its significance) and praxis (understanding, through participation in practice, how to be in the community and the world). Through the cultural practice of making molas, Guna women learn how to represent their world, becoming agentic meaning-makers, but also how to live, be, act and therefore belong in their world. Such is the role of social enculturation through shared practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) imply in their work that "learning is a way of being in the social world, not a way of coming to learn about it" (p.24). As they explain, learning is an evolving form of membership, involving the construction of identities. Therefore, identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another. For Guna women, their knowledge and mastery of mola-making is tied in with their becoming women (as demonstrated above), and therefore also with their belonging as full members of their society.

4.4.1 Belonging as Agentic Participants

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that "the greatest value of participation to the community and the learner lies in becoming part of the community" (p.111). Several interviewees suggested that they sew because they enjoy it, and they get satisfaction from it. At the same time, they feel respected by the community for it. An older man in the community stated that: "they are respected, because we know that they are doing a difficult job – it is not easy to sew a mola, and it takes a long time". In this sense, belonging is both a motivation and a reward for learning. Moreover, as they listen to the oral narratives sung by the *Saglas*, women are understood to be not only passive beings, but agentic ones, because they have a transformative function in their world: "the listener is invited to listen and realize the story in their own life" (Miselis Solano, 2020, p.32). As Flor put it, "what the Saglas sing in the House of Congress is represented in the material as we wear our molas. It is a dialogue. That is to say, they sing and we represent what they sing with our clothes. If what they sing is sacred, then our mola is sacred because it has a spirit". Therefore, when women sew their molas, they are

actively engaging as participants in their world, realizing their narratives, and thus belonging to the community.

4.4.2 Belonging as Meaning-Makers

In a similar way, as they sew, women are interpreters and creators of their world. Through a woman's sewing, she tells her own stories, representing what she thinks, feels and sees through her artwork. As such, the Gunadule consider mola-making a form of writing, in which the designs and techniques of elaboration are part of a language that portrays their reality and belief system on the fabric (MUMO, 2020). For instance, Flor explained that the shape of a medicinal plant (*Agebandermola*), which is used for head and body aches, might be depicted in the patterns of a mola. That mola is believed to possess the spirit of the plant that is portrayed, rendering protection to the user. Flor states: "the ancestral molas have a spirit (*burba*), they have their own life. Therefore, to wear that mola is not just to wear it, instead it represents that which represents the Guna identity". Further, the inspiration for the designs on the molas are drawn from the natural world. Jocabed suggests that: "all of our forms of art and representation in life have to do with the earth. Everything we have learned, we owe it to the land, to nature". The value of the artwork on the mola is therefore not simply due to the design. Instead, its value is intrinsic to its representation of the spirit of the depiction. This form of literacy thus becomes a means for women to represent their world and, in so doing, shape their way of being within it.

In some ways, the threads of their sewing also connect the Guna people's past to their future. As Guna women sew their molas, they create a record by which they (and their way of living) can be remembered in the future. At the same time, belonging to the community of Guna women who have made their molas over the generations connects them to their past and, through the narratives, to their worldview. For instance, the various layers in a woman's mola reflect the process through which *Baba* and *Nana* (God) laid down the various layers of the earth (*Ologwadule*), (Wagua, 2011a). Thus, as she sews, a Guna women engages with and re-enacts the narratives she is raised to live by, connecting knowledge with praxis. As Carvajal and Aguilar (2012) put it, molas are the "footprints of ancestral memory, and are associated with the history of origin, cosmovision, and conception of the world… as the woman sews, she writes the history of origin associated to the mola she is sewing" (p.17). In so doing, she honours the past and, in leaving a record (and teaching her daughters the practice), she creates a link to her people's future.

4.4.3 The Guna Way of Being

In this way, for the Guna, learning skills and therefore developing an identity are not just individual acts, these are rooted in an understanding of how to be(long) and live as part of the broader community in relation to each other and the natural world.

One of the maxims of Guna ethics is to live in community. The very structure of their society, spirituality and politics is centred around the House of Congress at the heart of the community, where the narratives are sung, and political decisions are made. In Guna the word *nega* means house or hut. Miselis Solano (2020) explains that, when the Gunadule speak of their political structure the word used is "onmagged nega", "onmagged" meaning to gather together, and collectively meaning House of Congress. As told in one of their narratives: different poles are needed to build a hut; some are stronger than others, but they are all important to hold up the structure. In the same way that the *nega* would not exist without the presence of the smallest part, each member of the Guna people is essential for making decisions. Through the narratives that form the basis for the Guna way of behaving (Anmar Daet), the Guna people are invited to carry out the metaphor of community in practice. When they build someone's house, they do so together, thus living out their ethics in action.



Figure 5. Onmagged nega, the House of Congress wherein political and spiritual gatherings occur.

In the same way, the formation of an individual identity is rooted in collective social membership, in the way of being Gunadule. For this reason, the identity of a woman who makes molas is tied in with her role as a belonging member of the community, a mother, grandmother, teacher, learner, and person in the world. Tellingly, the word Gunadule means "person that lives on the surface of the earth", where *Guna* refers to the surface of the earth, and *Dule* means "person" or "I am", indicative of the identity of a people (Carvajal & Aguilar, 2012; Stócel, 2011). The Gunadule thus define themselves interdependently, in relation to one another, as

sharing a collective identity, and in relation to the natural world around them as part of which we all live. Further, Wagua (2018) shows that the word for "narratives" (*negburbagan*) which form the basis for the Guna way of being, can translate to "spirit of the people". He says, "our forebears created those narratives with the aim of strengthening our spirit, maintaining our identity and unity" (Wagua, 2018, p.6). In this sense, the act of sewing molas transcends the development and learning of a single individual in favour of the collective heritage of a people. Most of the women interviewed expressed the importance of their work precisely in relation to the maintenance of their cultural identity. Susi recalls: "I was taught since I was little that this is our culture so it shouldn't be lost in us". Susana also states: "it's important so that the continuity of our identity is not lost". They therefore see teaching their daughters the practice as their responsibility to preserve their cultural identity as a people. As Álvarez (2018) explains, "each member of the community becomes an educating agent, in this sense, responsible for the survival of their culture" (p.28).

The act of holding onto the Guna way of being has taken on particular importance in the face of colonial genocide and epistemicide. Sagla Olonagdiginya argues: "our history cannot die, because it would be the death of our people", pointing to the narratives as "part of the heritage of the Guna people, their thoughts, their ways of valuing the world, their horizons and their life project (Arias, 2000, p.8). Miselis Solano (2020) also points to the remembrance of events through narratives and collective practice as a way to teach new generations that "forgetting is prohibited" and forming them to contribute to a socio-political organization that is rooted in Guna community values and ways of being and knowing in the world. The mola also plays an important part in the maintenance of Guna identity. One interviewee told us that "the Guna revolution[7], when they wanted to take away our traditional clothing by force, from there is born the Guna feeling of wanting to defend what is ours. The mola represents something sacred to us". Another pointed out that "sewing molas is our wellbeing because it has to do with our identity, our form of being Guna… it gives us a sense of identity, so we do not forget who we are". In this way, both the practice of mola-making, and the oral tradition are constitutive of the Guna way of being. Participation in such practices is therefore crucial to build a sense of individual and collective belonging.

4.4.4 Continuation Versus Adaptation

[7] Dule Revolution in 1925. See Appendix A.

This is not to say, however, that there is no room for change and adaptation in the practice of a community. Wagua (2005) writes that "each cultural group is like a living being that is transformed over time by growth and adaptation, without losing for that its identity" (p.24). In fact, Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that practice itself is always in motion: change is a fundamental property of Communities of Practice and their activities. Rogoff's definition of development above also points to the simultaneous transformation of the individual through participation in cultural activities, which in turn contributes to changes in the cultural community over generations. The tensions between reproduction and transformation or continuation and adaptation are inherent in learning processes and in a community's development. Learning implies both growth and change as the new generation both learns from and replaces the prior one. Sustained learning and survival in cultural communities is therefore simultaneously an act of reproducing and transforming a way of being. This is particularly visible when learners are viewed as participants and agents in their own learning.



Figure 6. Tension between reproduction and transformation embodies by the twins

One case which exemplifies this tension nicely is that of a set of twins we interviewed: one who loved to sew and wear her own molas (along with the rest of the traditional dress), and the other who did not enjoy it much, and who wore them only for special ceremonies. Their interests and appearance were affected by the amount of time they had each spent living in Panama versus more connected with the community (the later had lived longer in the City than the former), but also simply by their personal preferences. Despite being of the same generation and of the same family, they embodied the tensions of the new generations embracing or changing what has been passed down to them. Some community members lamented emphatically the loss of the ancestral mola designs and suggested that the youth are also losing the practice, while others maintain that their culture and identity is still very strong, and that adapting the mola to different, more sellable, forms is helpful for the local economy. Such tensions play themselves

out in shared participation, which Lave and Wenger (1991) describe as "the stage in which the old and the new, the known and the unknown, the established and the hopeful, act out their differences and discover their commonalities, manifest their fears of one another, and come to terms with their need for one another" (p.116).

In this way, belonging does not just mean growing to conform to the practice of the community, but also to be agentic participants who, in turn, shape the culture and life of the community. Where children are removed from these cultural systems of learning, the processes of reproduction and transformation loose balance, giving way to dissonance between education systems and the Guna way of being. This brings us to further reflections on the tensions between cultural forms of learning such as that explored here, and more westernized or "formal" systems of education brought to the community by waves of educational, religious, economic, cultural and territorial, colonization.[8]

5. Further Reflections

This dissertation has thus far provided an analysis of how Guna girls learn, through participation in sociocultural activities, to become in(ter)depent and to be(long) within their community. Yet this is only a fragment of the whole educational landscape. An exhaustive analysis of the educational realities in the classrooms and the system of "formal" education in Gunayala are beyond the scope of this study. Yet, the consequences of the disconnect between "formal" schooling and more traditional enculturation in Gunayala merit additional attention in order to highlight the importance of continuing to incorporate anthropological understandings of learning in the study of educational realities. These brief further reflections draw from the empirical data to take a step back from the research question and understand the relevance of the study at hand in light of the broader educational reality in Gunayala.

Two core implications with regards to the way Guna children are educated and thence how the community is able to reproduce itself are highlighted. The first shows that undervaluing knowledges that children bring to the classroom often results in poor scholastic performance and fewer opportunities for Guna children down the line. The second implication relates to some of the repercussions the Guna community faces when held between the system of "formal" education, and more local ways of knowing and being. As Wagua (n.d.) describes it,

[8] See Appendix A for a fuller overview of the history of education in Gunayala

the Gunadule find themselves caught between two antagonistic systems of education: that of the *waggas* for the Guna people versus *dulegad,* education which is original to and originated by the Guna people. The consequences of this disconnect are two-fold.

On the one hand, the existing system of schooling deracinates children from their contexts and expects them to leave the skills and knowledges acquired at home or in the community at the door of the classroom. In their place, Guna children learn (primarily in a language that is not their mother tongue) information that is meant to prepare them for life in a more globalized society. Yet, an ex-schoolteacher we interviewed said the curriculum had practically not changed in the forty years he taught. In first grade, children learned Panamanian geography. In third grade, children were taught Panamanian history, and the geography of different continents around the world. "In no document did it mention the rivers of Gunayala" said the ex-teacher, adding about the history curriculum: "It's an invasion. That history was written by another person, by the colonizers and the Panamanians". He admitted that in some instances he would disregard the curriculum handed him by the Panamanian Ministry of Education and adapt his teaching to "our environment" because, as he said "they are in their four walls with air conditioning, they do not know the environment in which we live nor what I should teach".

Even where efforts have been made to change the curriculum to increase its relevance to the community's needs, these efforts face serious challenges. These include: a very high percentage of students who, repeat one or more years or who simply flunk out and do not return to school; students who do poorly in school, but who also do not align themselves toward agriculture or fishing; the absence of fundamental cultural contents and *dulegaya* in the school curriculum due to time pressure to learn required content to avoid flunking the year (Álvarez, 2018; UNDP, 2016; Wagua, 2005, 2011b, 2014). Consequently, the statistics of student performance show that Guna students are twice as likely to repeat a year than are their non-indigenous Panamanian counterparts, and on average take almost three years longer to finish secondary school (Davis, 2010). Moreover, only 1.5% of women in Gunayala ever attend university, while 37% of them neither read nor write (UNDP, 2016).

On the other hand, more traditional forms of learning are neglected. For generations, the learning of Guna children responded to the immediate needs of the community and was rooted in their worldview and relationship to the land. To them, poverty does not refer to the lack of money, but to the lack of sufficient knowledge to live sustainably among themselves and in relation to the earth. Jocabed says: "Any person who does not know how to read the land, does not know how to live in community, or how to organize their family is poor". Therefore,

children are expected to grow and learn quickly at the feet of their mother, father, grandparents, kin to take on the capacity to live and sustain the community. For such capacities, the Guna structure of learning through practice among family and community was sufficient. And yet, changing demands on the community's resources and time, changing expectations of the way of living and greater participation in "formal" schooling have confronted the traditional Guna way of living.

With an emphasis on the need for young people to attend school in order to adapt to the modern job market, to work in the cities and send money home, or increase their standard of living, the more traditional forms of labour and knowing are being neglected, and further financial burdens have been placed on families to put their children through schools with ever-increasing tuition fees. This has led to a whole other set of consequences including: malnourishment, weakened Guna socio-political and cultural structures, weakened role of Guna women in the community, culturally, socially and economically, mass migration to the cities, and further loss of faith in the education system's ability to prepare Guna children to live in the world (Ministerio de Salud, 2018; UNDP, 2016). As Abadio Green Stócel (2011) puts it, "This educational reality causes much desertion and frustration among the girls and boys, which has distanced them from the reality of the Comarca, from their relations with their authorities, and even more from mother earth" (p.159). Perhaps most devastatingly, Guna children are not being equipped to handle the repercussions of the worsening climate crisis. With more frequent flooding of islands and coastal areas, and increased food and clean water insecurity (as riverbeds dry up and artisanal fishing is threatened), the Guna way of living, based as it is on their reliance and relationship with the land, is ever-more precarious.



Figure 7. Young boy playing in the streets of the island flooded with sea water.

6. Conclusion

This dissertation has attempted to understand the processes of learning that occur through participation in cultural practice in Gunayala. As such, it departs from a central premise in

sociocultural theory that learning is socially mediated, and results in the production, transformation and change of people through shared activity, who in turn contribute to changes in their cultural communities across generations. The study found that through participation in the community's sociocultural activity, Guna women learn how to become independent and interdependent, as well as how to be and belong within their social fabric.

Ongoing and increasing participation in the activities of the community, therefore, takes on great importance within these learning processes. Such participation relies on a combination of guidance by peers and elders (mostly immediate female relations) and unstructured time to engage with the practice in different ways (for instance through observation, play and dreams). The learning "curriculum" is designed by the ongoing practice of the community, within and through which Guna girls acquire the skills of the practice, and an understanding of the wider importance of it (through the oral tradition). Becoming a Guna woman implies growing into her role as an independent and interdependent agentic participant in the broader activity systems of the community. Belonging arises from the melding of both knowledge of the practice – the ability to make molas and understand their significance – and praxis – learning through participation how to be and behave in the community and the world.

Such an understanding of learning as participation in social practice casts into sharp relief the importance of recruiting anthropological approaches to learning into the curriculum in order to address the disjunction between cultural forms of learning and systems of formal schooling. This disconnect leads to, on the one hand, lower academic performance among Guna children in schools, and, on the other, weakening socioeconomic, cultural and political structures within Guna communities. While efforts have begun to find a bridge between local knowledges and more "formal" systems of education, these remain in early and partial stages of realization. If the Guna way of living is not only to survive but also to thrive, "formal" schooling will be needed to find a way to value and incorporate local forms of knowing.

In the context of our modern industries and societies, to do away with formal education system would be neither productive nor possible and would instead likely put the community at a great disadvantage. At the same time, however, as Wagua (2005) puts it, "education as a process of growth, change, development and assimilation cannot function outside the framework of values from the society in which it emerges, because there are no neutral processes of education" (p.37). To side-line the ways of knowing and learning that have emerged from generations of Guna culture and history is to cripple Guna children in the classroom, as well as in the face of challenges within their communities. Therefore, in order to

equip Guna children to live in a world wracked by uncertainties and loaded with paradoxes, a braiding of their cultural forms of learning and the knowledge that can be provided in schools is necessary. This will require that schools re-examine their curriculum, pedagogy, and structure in order to include in the formative process of new generations both the knowing and ways of learning of the ancestors (*inadules*, *neles*, *saglas*, historians, artisans, mothers, fathers and grandparents) and knowledge that can prepare Guna children to confront the challenges of the changing world they inhabit.

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Appendices

Appendix A – A Brief History of Education in Gunayala

Spanish colonization

It would be wrong to suggest that the history of education in Gunayala began with Spanish colonisation. In fact, Guna education was born with its very people, preceding any form of official schooling (Wagua, 2005). Yet, the arrival of the Spanish colonizers in the 16th century, which Todorov summarizes as the "greatest genocide of human history" (Stócel, 2011, p.21) forced a drastic shift in the way indigenous groups approached their education. As Stócel (2011) suggests, "the education brought by the colonizers to our land is not a history that remained in the past, instead it continues to reproduce the colonial heritage and, above all, reinforce the cultural, political and economic hegemony of the West" (p.58). This legacy did not end with the conclusion of Spanish rule in 1821. Instead, it was largely carried on in the 19th and 20th centuries by new characters, Spanish-descended but Panamanian-born in their Western-modelled project of nationalizing and modernizing their new emerging republic (Stócel, 2011).

Panamanian colonization

The continued negation of Guna culture, alongside that of other indigenous groups, became part of a widespread and absolute monoculturalization in favour of the Western prototype, in which any difference was viewed to manifested nothing more than varying grades of savagery (Wagua, 2007). This politically motivated assimilationism, also expressed as the "civilizing" of the indigenous populations, was seen as a necessary (and advantageous) road to unifying a new Panama. The new Panamanian Republic, set up upon breaking from Colombia in 1903, saw the Guna culture as an obstacle to their plan for progress, and thus it had to be eliminated (Stócel, 2011). Hence, in 1912, Law 56 authorized the "reduction to civilized life of the barbaric, semi-barbaric and savage tribes", which allowed for the sale of land and assistance to settlers, the creation of police outposts, courts, seaports and the establishment of schools for civilizing Guna people (Wagua, 2011b). In this context, schools and the use of the Spanish language were conceived of as the ideological weapons of the state to vanquish indigenous resistance and inculcate civilization and nationalism (Álvarez, 2018; Stócel, 2011; Wagua, 2007).

The Dule Revolution of 1925

At the outset of the 1920s, further and ever-more repressive initiatives were instated and carried out primarily by the Panamanian police force to accelerate indigenous cultural change. Such impositions included the repression and, in some cases, violent abolition of traditional ceremonies and rites; the ban on the use of women's traditional attire; violations of women; unjust incarcerations; and the expropriation of Guna territories (MUMO, 2020; Wagua, 2007). In response, several Guna leaders planned an insurrection to recover their autonomy and land. During the so-titled Dule Revolution in February 1925, twenty-six police officers were killed, and one Guna man died (Wagua, 2007). The accounts of 1925 are kept alive in the memories of Guna people even today through cultural activities and celebrations, where the events surrounding the Revolution are recreated and performed by the entire community.

The Guna leaders involved in the Revolution demanded their people's right to govern their own territory, practice their own traditions and culture, as well as the right to instate their own local education system (Stócel, 2011). While these demands were ultimately written into law, they were institutionalized at varying times and to different degrees. As of 16 September 1938, Gunayala was recognized as an autonomous territory with the right to govern itself, administer their own justice system (except in penal cases), and the right to manage their land and resources (Congresos Generales de Gunayala, 2013). An official agreement in 1953 authorized Gunas to administer their own education system, but this was not put into place (or given any serious thought by the Panamanian government) until revisited in 1995, even after which it took another 10 years to achieve any progress on this front (Wagua, 2014). The 1995 agreement between Gunayala and Panama highlighted the Guna's right to use their official language and spirituality, and crucially, the right to teach both of these in their schools (Congresos Generales de Gunayala, 2013, p.11). A further constitutional agreement in 2004 reaffirms the recognition of indigenous rights, and agrees to help conserve and promote their respective language learning and cultural development (Davis, 2010).

Characteristics of the Education System

Even with official recognition of the Guna people's right to ownership of their education, deeply ingrained challenges, rooted in the original colonial formation of schooling in Gunayala, remain. Members of the Guna community have long been keenly aware of the disconnect between the imposed schooling system, characterized by its mono-lingual, mono-cultural and

Western-centric curriculum and structure (Álvarez, 2018; Wagua, 2014), and local Guna forms of education. Some of the most insidious challenges they face were identified by a body of community representatives, known as the *Congreso General*, and educators responsible for the task of making Guna education more relevant and of higher quality. These include (summarized from Wagua, 2014):

- Classes offered only in Spanish when less than half of Guna children speak that language, compounded by the lack of any methodology to teach Spanish as a second language. Instead, Spanish is taught as if Guna children are already Spanish-speakers.
- The absence of the *dulegaya* as its own subject resulting in children's inability to read or write in their native tongue. Guna, instead, has been used as a "transitional language" to accelerate the teaching and learning of Spanish.
- Curricular contents that are completely inflexible and tested in Spanish, resulting in children's reliance on memorization primarily, without the possibility to analyse content where necessary.
- The accumulation of subjects that are disconnected from the reality surrounding students, which are often useless for life in the territory, are confusing for children, and inhibit wholistic identity development, leading to low self-esteem. This creates a barrier between the classroom and the Guna culture and alienates parents and the community from the teaching and learning of their children.
- Lack of a methodology to train teachers, who, even when they themselves are Gunadule, are trained as if to teach a classroom of non-guna children, and thus are ill-equipped to account for cultural and linguistic specificities in the community.

Educational policies that emphasize the cultural superiority of the West, and the Spanish language have therefore had wide-ranging impact on the learning of Guna children.

Members of the community see this disconnect between what is taught and how, and the needs of the community as a matter of survival. They argue that if their youth are raised to marginalize the values, culture and worldview of their people, and instead "chase after the easy things that the world of the *wagas* offers them", and if they are unable to continue telling the Gunadule's (his)stories, that will be the death of their people (Arias, 2000, p.6). Addressing the fundamental questions facing Guna education, both in and out of the classroom, therefore becomes a question of the survival of the Gunadule (Álvarez, 2018), especially in the face of external forces (capitalist markets, globalization, rising sea levels overfishing, among others) which threaten their way of living.

EBI Guna, a New Proposal

In response to these perceived threats, and as an attempt to reclaim Guna education *of* and *by* the people (Wagua, n.d.), a new program for Bilingual and Intercultural Education (EBI) was conceptualized by Aiban Wagua and others and written into law in 1995 (Congresos Generales de Gunayala, 2013). The program aimed to "decolonize the minds" of Guna students by offering an education system that not only respected Guna cultural values, but also integrated these in the contents and processes of teaching and learning, thus making the learners subjects and agents in their education, and not just "victims or mere objects to be educated" (Wagua, 2014, p.22). The proposal emphasized the importance of a contextualized curriculum, one which (re)located children in their locally lived reality, by, for instance, teaching children how to work the land, ensuring their agricultural subsistence capacity, and teaching them in their own language as well as in Spanish in order to consolidate their own identity, but also dialogue horizontally with other cultures around the world (Wagua, 2011b). In short, EBI Guna was meant to be everything that the previous education system was not.

From the outset, the program had the support of all parties involved, including the Guna General Congress, the Panamanian Education agency (MEDUCA), and funding from the Panamanian and Spanish governments. EBI Guna was written into law in 1995 (Congresos Generales de Gunayala, 2013), and its implementation began, after a period, in May 2004 (Wagua, 2014). Yet, even after the program's launch, progress has been slow. Wagua (2014) points to the lack of institutional readiness by the heads of the Ministry of Education and the indigenous groups, as well as the state's lack of political prioritization for such a program, as key reasons for this delay. Moreover, the existing educational system has already been rooted in Gunayala for over a century, making it, partly by force of habit, extremely difficult to shift (Álvarez, 2018; Stócel, 2011; Wagua, 2014). Such are the challenges facing current efforts to make Guna education more relevant and responsive to the needs of the community.

Appendix B – Sample semi-structured interview questions

1. How old were you when you started learning how to sew Molas?
2. Who taught you? Did you learn from several people or just one?
3. Do you remember how she taught you? What was the process like? Can you describe it to me? Is it a formal process?
4. Does learning how to sew happen individually or in collaboration with other girls? Did you learn with any sisters, or on your own?
5. If you have daughters, did you teach them how to sew as well? If so, did you teach them in the same way that you learned?
6. What is teaching your daughters like? are they interested in learning, or is it hard to get them motivated?
7. How do you feel when you are sewing Molas?
8. Why do you sew molas?
9. Are you particularly proud of any of your Molas? Why?
10. Do you tend to choose particular colours or designs for your Molas? Do these mean anything?
11. When do you typically find time to sew?
12. How long does it take to make a mola?
13. What do you normally do with your molas when you're done making them? (Do you sell them, wear them, display them?)
14. Is there any difference between the molas you make to keep or to sell?
15. What materials are needed to make molas?
16. Where do you get the materials to sew with? Are they accessible?
17. How is the level or skill of a woman at sewing evaluated?
18. Do you think it is important to continue teaching girls how to sew? Why, why not?
19. Do you remember the narrative behind why Guna women make Molas? What role to the narratives play in the teaching of mola-making?
20. What is done with a woman's molas when she passes?
21. Do you have responsibilities at home and/or in the community? What are these?
22. Is there a level of respect afforded women who know how to make molas?
23. What do the molas represent?
24. What language have you grown up with? Did you learn how to sew in that language?
25. Has your self-perception or identity changed as you've learned to sew? If so, how?

Appendix C – Research Proposal and Authorization from The Guna General Congress

Abril 19, 2020

Investigadora Principal: Luana DeBorst
Correo Electrónico: luana.deborst@sant.ox.ac.uk
Supervisor Académico: David Johnson
Correo Electrónico: david.johnson@sant.ox.ac.uk

Nacida en Ecuador, crecí aventurando y conociendo nuestro hermoso continente. Desde Ecuador hasta Argentina, Argentina a El Salvador, El Salvador a Costa Rica, con un breve intervalo en los Estados Unidos, tuve el privilegio de explorar varias tierras y culturas latinas. En el proceso fui expuesta a una gran variedad de sistemas educativos, lo cual fuertemente influyó mi decisión de cursar una maestría en Educación Comparativo e Internacional. Este proyecto de investigación es el resultado de larga reflexión sobre el conocimiento inherente que tienen nuestros pueblos y que, yo confío, vale compartir para ir mejorando de a poquito la educación para todas y todos.

Agradezco inmensamente esta oportunidad de convivir y aprender junto a ustedes y valoro cualquier consejo u aporte para fortalecer el estudio.

Sinceramente,
Luana DeBorst

Propuesta de Investigación
Preparada para el Congreso General Guna

Alrededor del mundo, los sistemas educativos se ven ampliamente influenciados por las nociones occidentales del desarrollo internacional. El colonialismo y neocolonialismo han delimitado lo que se considera “apropiado” y “efectivo” dentro de la educación en el “Tercer Mundo”, asimismo devaluando lo que se considera “menos importante” en el aprendizaje de nuestra juventud. Según la teoría que el desarrollo de una nación se logrará a base de la ampliación de su capital humano, los sistemas educativos ponen un énfasis casi ciego en la preparación del estudiante para entrar al mercado laboral. Sin embargo, se sigue viendo grandes porcentajes de desempleo, pobreza e inequidad en toda Latinoamérica. Esta realidad ha llegado a causar desilusión con la capacidad de la educación para conseguir movilidad social y abordar la inequidad.

No obstante, a medida que se desacreditan los principios de la teoría del capital humano, que domina el estudio de la educación, se abren espacios nuevos de dialogo que reconocen la importancia del contexto local en el desarrollo efectivo de la educación. La mirada de algunos teóricos educativos se ha vuelto a enfocar en los modelos educativos “alternativos” a los sistemas estandarizados, como ejemplos de una educación eficaz y relevante. Estos modelos de

Abril 19, 2020

transferencia de conocimiento intergeneracional, a menudo enraizadas en practicas comunitarias y culturalmente contextuales, han sido en gran parte ignoradas a medida que se formulan políticas educativas con el objetivo principal de cuantificar el crecimiento en la educación formal para cumplir con los estándares internacionales (poniendo, por ejemple, un énfasis extremo en el aumento de la matrícula escolar, sin importe la calidad de la educación ofrecida).

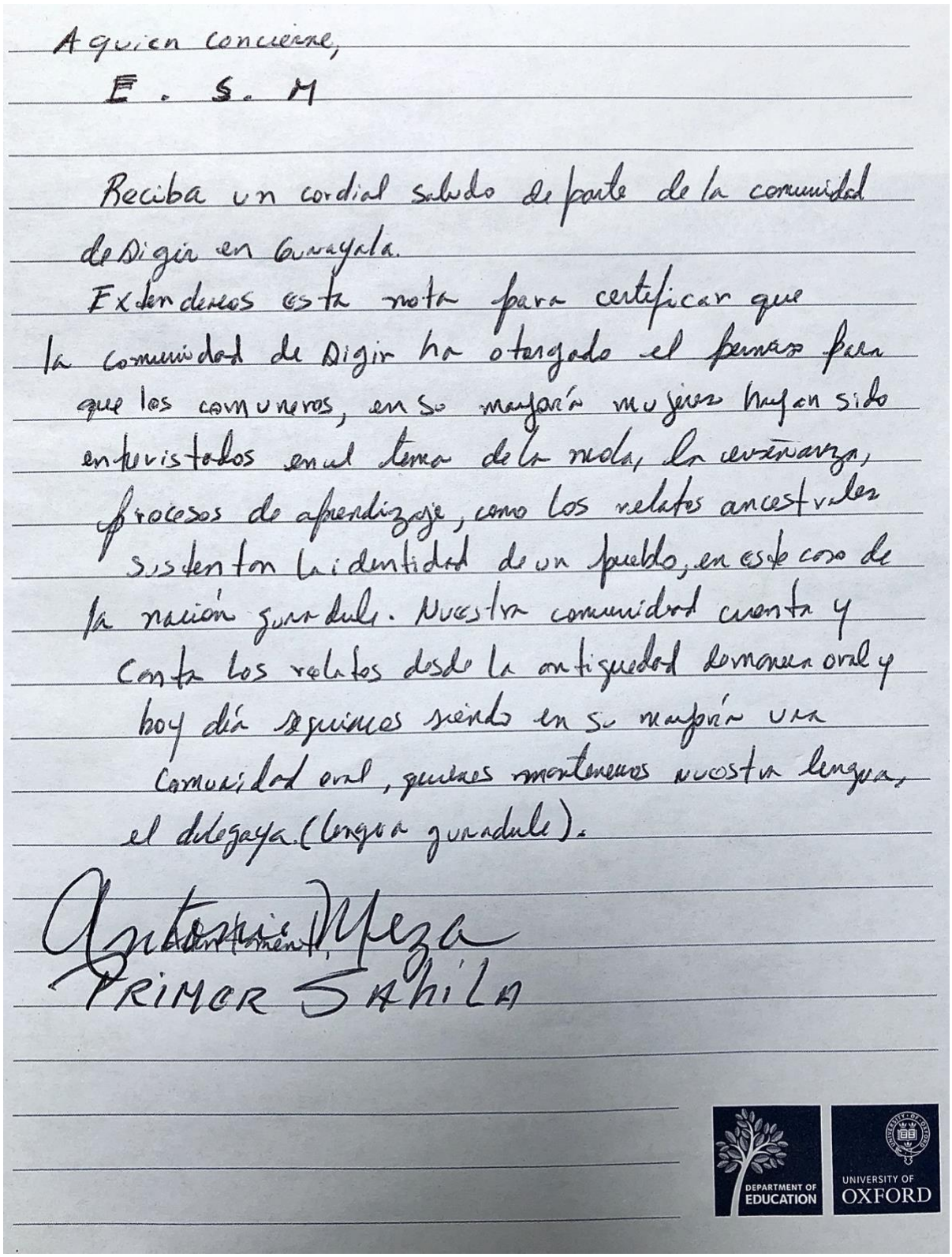
Dentro de este contexto, se hace sumamente importante aprender de los modos educativos no-formales que logran reforzar el aprendizaje de los jóvenes de manera contextual y relevante. La enseñanza y el aprendizaje en cual toda mujer Guna participa, por medio de la creación de la mola, provee un ejemplo perfecto para estudiar las maneras en que una comunidad transfiere, de una generación a la otra, el conocimiento y las destrezas necesarias para la formación de una identidad colectiva y para la supervivencia cultural.

Por lo tanto, mi investigación será un estudio antropológico con el objetivo de comprender cómo la comunidad de Gunayala apoya el aprendizaje de su juventud frente a los desafíos y a la incertidumbre. Algunas de las preguntas que informarán mi trabajo incluyen: ¿cómo se crea, guía, incorpora y estructura el significado dentro de las actividades culturales compartidas? ¿Cómo ayudan las formas artísticas culturalmente arraigadas a construir un sentido de la identidad colectiva y resiliencia en la comunidad Guna? ¿Cómo integra su tejido social el aprendizaje en las artes? ¿Cómo nos ayuda la comprensión de las formas de aprendizaje Gunas a re imaginar la misión de la educación tanto a nivel local como global? Así, el estudio se interesa por entender las maneras en las cuales las artes facilitan la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de una epistemología compartida a base de la forma artística de la mola.

Se utilizará el marco teórico desarrollado por Jean Lave y Etienne Wenger que define el aprendizaje no solamente como el desarrollo cognitivo del individuo, sino también, el desarrollo del individuo como participante dentro de las actividades contextualmente localizadas dentro de la comunidad. La metodología será a base de la observación y de entrevistas con adultos de la comunidad. Estos se harán solamente con el permiso explicito de los participantes.

El proyecto se tomará acabo como requisito de aprobación para el curso de maestría en Educación Comparativa e Internacional acreditada por la Universidad de Oxford en Inglaterra. El estudio ha sido aprobado por el comité ético de la Universidad (CUREC).

Cualquier publicación del estudio fuera de los archivos universitarios se hará solamente con el permiso de los participantes.



A quien concierne,

E. S. M

Reciba un cordial saludo de parte de la comunidad de Digir en Gunayala.

Extendemos esta nota para certificar que la comunidad de Digir ha otorgado el permiso para que los comuneros, en su mayoría mujeres hayan sido entrevistados en el tema de la moda, la enseñanza, procesos de aprendizaje, como los relatos ancestrales sustentan la identidad de un pueblo, en este caso de la nación guna dule. Nuestra comunidad cuenta y conta los relatos desde la antiguedad de manera oral y hoy día seguimos siendo en su mayoría una comunidad oral, gracias mantenemos nuestra lengua, el dulegaya. (lengua guna dule).

Atentamente, Meza
PRIMER SAHILA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Appendix D – Additional Forms

From: **Joshua McGrane** joshua.mcgrane@education.ox.ac.uk
Subject: RE: CUREC!
Date: 10 March 2020 at 11:28
To: Luana Deborst luana.deborst@sant.ox.ac.uk
Cc: Education Research Office research.office@education.ox.ac.uk, David Johnson david.johnson@sant.ox.ac.uk

Dear Luana,

Title: "A study of culturally ingrained art forms in building collective identity and resilience amongst the people of Gunayala."
The above resubmitted application (reference number ED-CIA-20-086) has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted.

If your research involves participants whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question (this includes those under 18 and vulnerable adults), then it is advisable to read the following NSPCC professional reporting requirements for cases of suspected abuse
http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/questions/reporting_child_abuse_wda74908.html

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application you should submit details to research.office@education.ox.ac.uk for consideration.

Good luck with your research study.
Yours sincerely,
Joshua McGrane
Member of DREC

Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford OX2 6PY





Supervisor: David Johnson
Supervisor email: David.Johnson@sant.ox.ac.uk
Primary Researcher: Luana DeBorst, MSc Comparative and International Education
Oxford University telephone number: 01865 274 024
Oxford University e-mail: Luana.DeBorst@sant.ox.ac.uk

Identity and Resilience in *Gunayala*

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

ED-CIA-20-086

1. ***Why is this research being conducted?***

   This study is a largely anthropological approach to understanding how the community of Gunayala supports the learning of its young people in the face of challenges and uncertainty. It will ask how meaning is made, guided, incorporated and structured within shared cultural activities in order to explore how culturally ingrained forms of art help build a sense of collective identity and resilience in the community.

2. ***Why have I been invited to take part?***

   You have been invited because you are a member of the *Guna* community who has been raised there, you understand and take part in cultural activities shared with your community.

3. ***Do I have to take part?***

   No. You can ask questions about the research before deciding whether or not to take part. If you do agree to take part, you may withdraw yourself from the study at any time, without giving a reason, by advising me of this decision by March 20th, 2020. Data will not be shared or used in any way until that date.

4. ***What will happen to me if I take part in the research?***

   If you are happy to take part in the research, you will be interviewed. The interview should take between approximately 30 minutes. You can also ask to pause or stop the interview at any time.

   If you are still happy to take part, we will ask you to sign a consent form. Also, with your consent, I would like to audio record you so I can have an accurate record of your thoughts. If relevant, I would like to take photographs of you, or your craft so I can accurately represent your work. Finally, if necessary, I would like to take a short video of you and your craft to accurately remember the procedure. I will only take these with your further consent.

5. ***Are there any potential risks in taking part?***

   There is a small risk of breach of confidentiality. To reduce any potential risks of this, will pseudonymise your personal information.

6. ***Are there any benefits in taking part?***

There will be no direct or personal benefit to you from taking part in this research.

7. What happens to the data provided?

The information you provide during the study is the **research data**. Any research data from which you can be identified (in this case only your name) is known as **personal data**.

- **Personal data** will be stored on my computer, which is password-protected, for as long as needed to conduct the research.
- **Other research data** (including consent forms) will be stored for at least 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research.

The researcher and supervisor will have access to the research data. Responsible members of the University of Oxford may be given access to data for monitoring and/or audit of the research.

I would like your permission to use direct quotes against a pseudonym.

8. Will the research be published?

The University of Oxford is committed to the dissemination of its research for the benefit of society and the economy and, in support of this commitment, has established an online archive of research materials. This archive includes digital copies of student theses successfully submitted as part of a University of Oxford postgraduate degree programme. Holding the archive online gives easy access for researchers to the full text of freely available theses, thereby increasing the likely impact and use of that research.

The research will be written up as a student's thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it may be deposited both in print and online in the University archives to facilitate its use in future research. If so, the thesis will be openly accessible.

9. Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (ED-CIA-20-086)

10. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please contact David Johnson (David.Johnson@sant.ox.ac.uk) and we will do our best to answer your query. I will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible:

11. Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the study.
The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest.
Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from https://compliance.web.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights.

12. Further Information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

Supervisor: David Johnson
Primary Researcher: Luana DeBorst, MSc Comparative and International Education
Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
University tel: 01865 274 024
University email: Luana.DeBorst@sant.ox.ac.uk

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Supervisor: David Johnson
Supervisor email: David.Johnson@sant.ox.ac.uk
Primary Researcher: Luana DeBorst, MSc Comparative and International Education
Oxford University telephone number: 01865 274 024
Oxford University e-mail: Luana.DeBorst@sant.ox.ac.uk

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

ED-CIA-20-086

Identity and Resilience in *Gunayala*

Purpose of Study: My research will be a largely anthropological approach to understanding how the community of *Gunayala* supports the learning of its young people in the face of challenges and uncertainty. It will ask how meaning is made, guided, incorporated and structured within shared cultural activities in order to explore how culturally ingrained forms of art help build a sense of collective identity and resilience in the community.

		Please initial each box
1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalty.	☐
3	I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by authorised people outside the research team. I give permission for these individuals to access my data.	☐
4	I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.	☐
5	I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	☐
6	I understand how this research will be written up and published.	☐
7	I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	☐
8	I consent to being audio recorded	☐
9	I consent to being video recorded	☐
10	I consent to having my photo taken	☐

11	I understand how audio recordings / videos / photos will be used in research outputs.	☐
12	I agree to the use of direct quotes, attributed to my name, in research outputs	☐
13	I agree to take part in the study	☐

_____	dd / mm / yyyy	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

_____	dd / mm / yyyy	_____
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature

Departamento de Educación
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Supervisor: David Johnson
Supervisor correo electrónico: David.Johnson@sant.ox.ac.uk
Investigadora Principal: Luana DeBorst, Educación Comparativo e Internacional
Universidad tel: 01865 274 024
Correo electrónico Universitario: Luana.DeBorst@sant.ox.ac.uk

Identidad y Resistencia en *Gunayala*

FORMULARIO INFORMATIVO PARA PARTICIPANTES

Número de Aprobación del Comité Ético de Investigación de la Universidad de Oxford: ED-CIA-20-086

1. ***¿Por qué se está realizando esta investigación?***

   Esta investigación es un estudio antropológico con el objetivo de comprender cómo la comunidad de Gunayala apoya el aprendizaje de su juventud frente a los desafíos y a la incertidumbre. El estudio se interesará por entender las maneras en las cuales la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de una epistemología compartida se facilita a base de la forma artística de la mola.

2. ***¿Por qué me han invitado a participar?***

   Usted ha sido invitado porque es miembro/a de la comunidad Guna que se ha criado allí. Usted comprende y participa en las actividades culturales compartidas en su comunidad.

3. ***¿Tengo que participar?***

   No. Puede hacer preguntas sobre la investigación antes de decidir si participará o no. Si acepta participar, puede retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento, sin dar una razón, informándome de esta decisión antes del 20 de marzo de 2020. Sus datos no se compartirán ni se utilizarán de ninguna manera hasta esa fecha.

4. ***¿Qué me podrá pasar si participo en la investigación?***

   Si decide participar en la investigación, será entrevistado. La entrevista tomará aproximadamente 30 minutos. Usted podrá solicitar pausar o detener la entrevista en cualquier momento.

   Si decide participar, le pediré que firme un formulario de consentimiento. Además, con su consentimiento, es posible que grabe en audio para poder tener un registro preciso de sus pensamientos. Si es relevante, me gustaría tomar fotografías de usted y de su oficio para poder representar con precisión su trabajo. Finalmente, si es necesario, me gustaría tomar un breve video de usted y su oficio para recordar con precisión el procedimiento. Sólo los tomaré con su consentimiento.

5. ***¿Existe algún riesgo potencial al participar?***

Existe un pequeño riesgo de violación de la confidencialidad. Para reducir cualquier riesgo potencial de esto, se podrá utilizar un seudónimo si prefiere.

6. ¿Habrá algún beneficio al participar?

No habrá ningún beneficio directo o personal para usted al participar en esta investigación.

7. ¿Qué pasa con la información proporcionada?

La información que proporciona durante el estudio se consideran datos de la investigación. Cualquier información de investigación de la que pueda identificarse (en este caso solo su nombre) se conoce como información personal.

La información personal se guardará en mi computadora (que está protegida con contraseña) durante el tiempo que sea necesario para realizar la investigación.

Otros datos de la investigación (incluidos los formularios de consentimiento) se archivarán durante al menos 3 años después de la publicación de la investigación por razones legales.

Solamente la investigadora principal y el supervisor tendrán acceso a los datos de la investigación. Los miembros responsables de la Universidad de Oxford pueden tener acceso a datos para el monitoreo y / o auditoría de la investigación.

Me gustaría su permiso para usar citas directas contra un seudónimo.

8. ¿Se publicará la investigación?

La Universidad de Oxford está comprometida a la difusión de sus investigaciones en beneficio de la sociedad y la economía y, en apoyo de este compromiso, ha establecido un archivo en línea de materiales de investigación. Este archivo incluye copias digitales de las tesis estudiantiles presentadas con éxito como parte de un programa de posgrado de la Universidad de Oxford. Mantener el archivo en línea da acceso al texto completo de la tesis gratuitamente a otros estudiantes e investigadores, lo que aumenta el uso e impacto probable de esa investigación.

9. ¿Quién ha approvado este estudio?

Este estudio se ha aprobado por el Comité Ético de Investigación de la Universidad de Oxford

10. ¿Con quién me comunico si tengo alguna inquietud sobre el estudio o si deseo quejarme?

Si tiene alguna inquietud sobre cualquier aspecto de este estudio, comuníquese con David Johnson (David.Johnson@sant.ox.ac.uk) y haremos todo lo posible para atender su consulta. Reconoceré su preocupación dentro de 10 días y le daré una indicación de cómo se abordará. Si no está satisfecho o desea presentar una queja formal, comuníquese con el Presidente del Comité de Ética de Investigación de la Universidad de Oxford, que tratará de resolver el asunto lo antes posible.

11. Protección de datos

La Universidad de Oxford es el controlador de información con respecto a sus datos personales y, como tal, determinará cómo se usan sus datos personales en el estudio.
La Universidad procesará sus datos personales con el propósito de la investigación descrita anteriormente. La investigación es una tarea que se realiza en interés público.
Puede encontrar más información sobre sus derechos con respecto a sus datos personales en https://compliance.web.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights

12. Información adicional y detalles de contacto

Si desea discutir la investigación con alguien de antemano (o si tiene preguntas después), comuníquese con:

Supervisor: David Johnson
Investigadora principal: Luana DeBorst, Maestría en Educación Comparativa e Internacional
Departamento de Educación
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
Universidad tel: 01865 274 024
Correo electrónico Universitario: Luana.DeBorst@sant.ox.ac.uk

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Supervisor correo electrónico: David.Johnson@sant.ox.ac.uk
Investigadora Principal: Luana DeBorst, Educación Comparativo e Internacional
Universidad tel: 01865 274 024
Correo electrónico Universitario: Luana.DeBorst@sant.ox.ac.uk

FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO DEL PARTICIPANTE

Número de Aprobación del Comité Ético de Investigación de la Universidad de Oxford: ED-CIA-20-086

Identidad y Resistencia en *Gunayala*

Propósito de la investigación: esta investigación será un estudio antropológico con el objetivo de comprender cómo la comunidad de Gunayala apoya el aprendizaje de su juventud frente a los desafíos y a la incertidumbre. El estudio se interesará por entender las maneras en las cuales la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de una epistemología compartida se facilita a base de la forma artística de la mola.

		Firme con Iniciales
1	Confirmo que he leído y entendido la información proveída acerca de la investigación. He tenido la oportunidad de considerar y hacer preguntas sobre la información y he obtenido respuestas satisfactorias.	☐
2	Entiendo que mi participación es voluntaria y que estoy a libertar de retirarme en cualquier momento, sin dar razón alguna, y sin cualquier consecuencia.	☐
3	Entiendo que los datos coleccionados en el transcurso del estudio podrán ser mirados por individuos autorizados fuera del equipo investigativo. Doy mi permiso para que estos individuos tengan acceso a mis datos.	☐
4	Entiendo que este proyecto se ha revisado, y ha sido aprobado por el Comité Ético de Investigación de la Universidad de Oxford.	☐
5	Entiendo quiénes tendrán acceso a mis datos personales, cómo los datos serán archivados y qué pasará con los datos al finalizarse el proyecto.	☐
6	Entiendo cómo esta investigación será escrito y publicado.	☐
7	Entiendo cómo plantear una inquietud o presentar una queja.	☐
8	Doy mi consentimiento a que me graben audio	☐
9	Doy mi consentimiento a que me graben por video	☐
10	Doy mi consentimiento a que me tomen fotos	☐

11	Entiendo cómo se utilizarán las fotos y grabaciones de audio/video en los resultados de la investigación.	☐
12	Estoy de acuerdo con el uso de citas directas, atribuidas a mi nombre, en los resultados de investigación	☐
13	Acepto participar en el estudio	☐

	dd / mm / aaaa	
Nombre del Participante	Fecha	Firma

	dd / mm / aaaa	
Nombre de la persona tomando consentimiento	Fecha	Firma