

**The arrows of Olowaili: sound, movement and Guna culture in  
Monique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue***

**As flechas de Olowaili: o som, o movimento e a cultura Guna em  
*Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* por Monique Mojica**

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**Summary:** This article examines the drama *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (1991) by Guna Rappahannock dramaturge, Monique Mojica, utilizing a focus on the indigenous culture and language of the Guna, to demonstrate that Mojica includes Guna language and cultural elements in her play that other critics have previously overlooked. Taking into consideration the Guna art of sewing *molas*<sup>2</sup> and stories from Guna oral history alongside Mojica's personal family history, her Guna name, *Olowaili* and theories on dramaturgy, it is possible to conclude that her work is much more autobiographical than previously thought. Mojica does not only tell the stories of other indigenous women affected by colonization, as suggested by earlier critical readings; she includes her own connections to Guna culture and history in order to recreate her identity as an indigenous Guna woman.

**Keywords:** Monique Mojica. Guna. Autobiographical fiction. *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*.

**Resumo:** Este artigo examina o drama *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (1991), da dramaturga Guna Rappahannock, Monique Mojica, utilizando um enfoque sobre a cultura e a linguagem dos indígenas Guna para demonstrar que Mojica inclui a linguagem e elementos Guna em seu drama que outros críticos anteriormente ignoraram. Considerando a arte de costurar as *molas* (uma vestimenta tradicional Guna), as histórias da tradição oral Guna lado a lado das histórias pessoais de sua família, o seu nome Guna, *Olowaili* e teorias do drama, é possível concluir que sua obra é muito mais autobiográfica do que tem pensado. Mojica não somente conta as histórias das outras mulheres indígenas afetadas pela colonização, como anteriormente sugerido em outras leituras críticas, ela inclui suas próprias conexões com a história e a cultura Guna para recriar sua identidade como mulher indígena Guna.

**Palavras-chaves:** Monique Mojica. Guna. Ficção autobiográfica. *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*.

Critics often have delved into the various cultural layers of meaning in one of Mojica's first dramatic works, *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (1991), concluding that overall, the piece is not autobiographical. Even her cousin, Murielle

Borst, has remarked in “Spiderwoman Theatre’s Legacy” that in this particular drama Mojica “didn’t use her personal stories; she took characterizations of different women and she performed them on stage using the method of story weaving” (p. 79). Many critics have also concluded this in part because of Mojica’s comments in the published version of the play. She notes that there was a structure based on four transfigurations that corresponded to different stories of women or female entities: the women who birthed the Metís, Pocahontas, La Malinche and the Women of the Puna (*Princess Pocahontas*, p. 16). In this way, Mojica shares voices and performs stories from across the Americas as critics have previously asserted. Nevertheless, there are different elements of movement, sound and spoken words that Mojica surreptitiously stitches into the published version of the drama that critics have yet to identify and discuss. The first part of this article will juxtapose those previously unnoticed elements alongside Mojica’s connections to the Guna of Panamá, and the significance of her Guna name, *Olowaili*. The second section will look at the Guna art of *mola* making and how it informs Mojica’s process for creating *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*. In discussing the significance of these elements, it is possible to see this play not only as a transnational contestation of indigenous agency against colonizing histories; it also is a very personal of expression of the playwright discussing her identity as a member of the Guna community and the Native American community as a whole.

The drama *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, rather than telling a linear story in dramatic form, is a collection of dramatic transformations or vignettes that can be connected together, creating a space to discuss the identity of native women. The dramatic narrative is complex given that only two actresses (Monique Mojica and Alejandra Nuñez in the original production) played 22 separate roles. These characters enter and exit the stage throughout the performance telling their stories and also transform into other characters on stage. For example, in transformation one, Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides leaps off a precipice, transforming herself into the role of Contemporary Woman #1. In transformation 6, the character Storybook Pocahontas, transforms onstage into Lady Rebecca and then to Matoaka (the lesser known name of Pocahontas). Mojica plays all of these characters and relates their stories without exiting the stage.

While critics have discussed the significance of this play as a collection of individual stories spoken through Mojica, little attention has been paid to the playwright's life story told within the play. Wendy Walters has noted the importance the work for "restoring agency to those women whose representation in colonial history has stripped them of power" ("After the Last", p. 249). Jill Carter however, has observed that the work is not "devoid of any autobiographical strands... Mojica does recall her own brief encounter with Annie Mae Aquash at Rosebud, South Dakota... and the taped portion of her song of Transformation Twelve is, in large part, a love song to her husband Fernando Hernandez... recalling the first time she traveled to his home in Mexico" (*Repairing the Web*, p. 261). Carter argues that these strands "serve to contextualize and deepen the bigger picture while tightly binding the descendant (Mojica) into relationship with those ancestral mothers of the Peoples of mixed ancestry who speak their stories through her" (*Repairing the Web*, p. 262). Carter is very adept at identifying some of the personal stories Mojica wove into the drama, yet there are, however other autobiographical strands present in *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* that have gone overlooked and point to a much stronger autobiographical narrative in the drama. To understand why this thread of narrative has long gone unseen and its importance, we first consider the significance of Mojica's Guna name, the Guna art of *mola*-making in the work as well as her family history.

Stars have been powerful symbols for Monique Mojica's mother Gloria Miguel, and her aunt, Lisa Mayo. The stage production *Nis Bundor: Daughters from the Stars* (1995) is, in part, a dramatic expression of how the Miguel family has reconnected with their father's Guna family and community. This multi-layered dramatic *mola* employs the Guna oral story of Olonadili and her sisters from the stars as a way to begin healing from the pain of a divided family and to reaffirm their identities as Guna women. As Carter has shown, this journey of both sisters to search out and affirm their Guna identities had lasting healing effects not only for the two sisters but also for all "their female children [who] have been 'reclaimed' (as it were) – woven back into the fabric of Antonio Miguel's community of origin" (*Repairing the Web*, p. 50). The story of the daughters from the stars has become a powerful one for all the Miguel family.

Monique Mojica has recently written about another family story, which includes the name of a different star from the Guna oral tradition with special significance for her. This story is about *Olowaili* (or the morning star) and it appeared in one of her recent publications entitled “Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky way” (2009). The article discusses her new theatrical production with the same title. She mentions how her Grandfather, Antonio Miguel, gave Mojica her Guna name after he “saw *Olowaili* fall to earth over New York harbour” (p. 124). Understanding the powerful meanings behind Mojica’s Guna name as well as the act of naming a person in the Guna culture can provide a new reading to *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*.

In Guna, the word *nugamied* is a composite of the word *nuga* (name) and the word *amied* (to search). This word is employed in Guna culture when a person receives or chooses her or his Guna name. It is a very important part of Guna ritual and involves an active search for the person who is naming or being named. Joel Sherzer explains in *Kuna Ways of Speaking* (1983) that the prefixes *olo*, *mani*, *ina* and *ikwa* “are involved in the formation of the *nuka sunnat* (true name) of all objects labeled by the nouns... Human ‘true names’ also make use of these prefixes” (p. 25-6). In the act of *ofnugamied*, one does not simply give or receive a name; he or she seeks it out and that search culminates in a very significant ritual.

There are two naming rituals in *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* that connect two female characters in the play back to their indigenous identity and community. The first naming ritual in the play discusses the day Matoakais initiated as a member of her nation. Carter has shown that Pocahontas received the name Matoaks/Matoaka for the white feathers that were braided into her hair and that these white feathers (Matoaks) “were in Powhatan circles a signifier of her position within the community” (Blind Faith, p. 14). Mojica’s choice to end transformation six with the story of Matoaka alters the stories that most people have come to accept as the “official history” of the native woman known as Pocahontas. Matoaka announces to the audience that she will soon choose the paints for her body. “My mother says, I have to have my own paint that’s only mine” (p. 32). That Mojica ends the story of Pocahontas/Lady Rebecca with the story of Matoaka is significant because it establishes that there is a lasting connection between indigenous

women and men to their communities that cannot be erased by colonial histories. That connection is established in the act of naming. Carter has noted that Mojica's ancestors, (those of her maternal grandmother) came from Virginia and that their nation is a part of the Powhatan alliance (*Repairing the Web*, p. 28), the same as Matoaka's. Carter has also gone further to suggest that "the myriad layers that comprise *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* are each anchored to the figure of a seventeenth-century Rappahannock girl, so maligned and misaligned that she has become unrecognizable to her own descendants" (*Blind Faith*, p. 13). Nevertheless, it can be affirmed that Mojica's drama also anchors her work to the Guna cultural heroine Olowaili, a figure that Carter has overlooked in this play. While Mojica never utters her Guna name in the play, it is possible to see indirect references to Olowaili that Contemporary Woman #1 speaks of in transformation eight.

In order to look further into the analysis of the Guna naming ritual in transformation eight, it is helpful to provide first a brief explanation of a *Gunainna* puberty ritual. This ritual is similar to the ritual Matoaka describes in transformation six in that both celebrations mark the entrance into womanhood. In the *inna* ceremony, the young woman's hair is cut short and the girl's father provides food and drink for the festivities. The whole village eats and drinks in honor of the young woman. Apart from eating, drinking, and ritual hair cutting, "one of the important official events is the selection of a secret *nuka sunnat* (true name) for the girl by the *kantule* [religious leader and knower of Guna stories and rituals]" (Sherzer, p. 143). During this ceremony, the *kantule* and his assistants also perform a long *igar* or chant directed to the spirit of a *kammu* or long flute (Sherzer, p. 139-40). All of these activities mentioned by Sherzer are key to the ritual that honors a young Guna woman and welcomes her as an important member of her people with an individual spirit and identity.

Parts of the *inna* ritual are discretely mentioned in transformation eight in *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*. This transformation contains a very poetic soliloquy in which Contemporary Woman #1 remembers her "grandfathers" while addressing a character simply called "The Man." She addresses him saying: "You smile a crooked smile, embarrassed that I see them in you – all my grandfathers; those short, dark men with broad shoulders and heavy muscled calves, with hard working feet that were made

for climbing coconut trees and walking in the sand; their pigeon-toed gait out of time on the sidewalks of the city” (p. 38). In the face of this man, Contemporary Woman #1 sees her grandfathers, adapted to life in tropical climates, scaling coconut trees and walking through sand. Guna men often plant and harvest coconuts on the small coral reef islands in the Comarca Guna Yala. Mojica’s Guna grandfather, Antonio Miguel, went from living a life on the coral reef island of Narganá, Panamá, walking on sandy beaches, along with his father, who probably gathered and carried coconuts on his broad shoulders. Antonio, as an adult, later immigrated to New York where he most certainly walked the sidewalks on a daily basis. In this passage, Contemporary Woman #1’s grandfather has a similar life to that of Mojica’s grandfather. Here more of the autobiographical strands of Mojica’s Guna heritage are woven into *Princess Pocahontas*.

This passage and its connection to a Guna community *inna* celebration is amplified with the Guna words that Contemporary Woman #1 speaks. She continues, telling The Man that “it was months before I could explain to you that this woman, so exhilarated by the sound of the sikus, the pipes, the camu, was feeling the sound running through her veins!” (p. 39). With this stitch of narration, the Guna words “camu”, “siku” and the bamboo pipes connect several layers of meaning in the text. The blood that flows through the protagonist’s veins creates feelings of exhilaration while she recalls the sound of the gammu. One can read this passage as a reference to the celebration of the Guna puberty *inna* ritual, when a young Guna woman discovers a new identity and name for herself. Through these symbols, she recreates a part of the *inna* ceremony that lives on in her. In this small portion of transformation eight, we see the poetic juxtaposition of the concepts of death and dying with the words “old” and “mourning” alongside the sounds of life with the bamboo pipes, and the exhilaration she feels with all these sounds running through her veins.

As Contemporary Woman #1 remembers her Guna grandfathers in transformation eight, she recalls the sound of the “camu” or flute that they played. Here there are two sounds running through Contemporary Woman #1’s veins: those of the pipes, the camu (or gammu) the long slender flute that the Guna play at puberty ceremonies, and the *sikus*. The word “siku” may be read as an alternate spelling of the word “sigu” or arrow in *Dulegaya*. In this short passage there are three images of objects with similar sizes and

shapes that also produce whistling sounds. The sound the *sigu* makes as it pierces the air joins the whistle of the *gammu* and grandfathers with their “high pitched wail” in their “mourning for their lost home” (*Princess Pocahontas*, p. 39). The cacophony of the *sigu*, the *gammu* and the cry of the grandfathers all join together and gather force inside of her. Those sounds emanate from the past, from a distant land and project out to the future.

Although Contemporary Woman #1 reflects upon her grandfather's feelings of being out of place and time in transformation, she also recalls how her grandfather Antonio, through ceremony and ritual found ways to survive living in a new community that was so different from the one he left. “I remember my grandfathers sitting in my grandmother's parlour, Sunday afternoons, playing the *camu* – blowing across the bamboo pipes... One of them would start to cry – a high-pitched wail. The others would tease and laugh; but one by one they'd join his cry; a brotherhood of old, brown men mourning their lost home” (*Princess Pocahontas*, p.39). Contemporary Woman #1 captures through her dramatic speech the memory of her grandfathers gathered together to play the *gammu* and the “bamboo pipes” while mourning their lost home. Mojica intersperses sadness with hope in her description of the gathering of old brown men mourning their lost home. In the act of playing of the pipes the men are able to still form a new community that connects them back to their home they left behind.

While at first glance it may seem that the word “mourn” is often related to death and dying, permanent separation and no return, the mournful cries of her grandfathers recreate a new Guna community in the middle of a city, miles away from their homeland. The Guna community that they mourn lives on, although in a new form. The ceremonial gathering of Contemporary Woman #1's grandfathers needs not be read as the memory of something that has long ago died, but as a community that lives on in her body, in her blood. It is of consequence to note that the verb *diged* in *Dulegaya* has a double meaning: to inter, to bury, to plant and to cultivate (*Gayamar*, p.38). A word such as “mourn” may be a cry for what has been buried, but it is also a celebration for that which has been planted and will bring forth new life. As the *gammu* is played at the *inna* ritual in celebration of a young woman coming of age, of life continuing, the blood courses through the body of Contemporary Woman #1. Through Mojica, her Guna community

will continue on through the performance and remembrance of the rituals embodied in the sounds and movements she has observed from her transplanted Guna community living in New York.

That Mojica shares this memory of her grandfather in transformation 8 is more than coincidence. Eight is a number with great symbolic and historical meaning for the Guna, it is also a number directly related to Mojica's Guna name, Olowaili. Guna leader Carlos López Inakeliginia shares the significance of the name Olowaili and the number eight in his *testimonio*, *Así lo vi y así me lo contaron* (1996). In the *testimonio*, Inakeliginia tells the oral history of Gabayai and her eight children, one of those children is named Olowaili. In the story, a grandmother toad named Gueloyai kills the Guna mother Gabayai shortly after she gives birth to eight children: seven sons and one daughter. The toad Gueloyai then takes the eight children and tells them that she is their true mother. The children work for their adoptive mother fishing and hunting for her, but she keeps the best pieces of meat for herself and her biological children. She tosses whatever scraps remain back to Gabayai's eight children. Gabayai's children, as they see their reflection in the river begin to doubt Gueloyai's assertion that she is their real mother. When they become restless, Gueloyai makes bows and arrows as toys for the eight children. Those bows and arrows break easily when Gabayai's children play with them. The children quickly learn to make their own weapons that do not fall apart and defeat the grandmother toad. Inakeliginia let his readers know that Olowaili played a key role in the creation of those weapons:

“Cuando la única hermana de los ocho, Olouaili, creció y se hizo toda una mujer, empezó a tejer las junturas de las flechas y los arcos. Las flechas armadas por la joven Olouaili no se rompían, nacían del mismo dolor de los ocho hermanos.... Así las flechas que hacía Olouaili no se rompían, salían afiladas, salían fuertes” (p. 19-32).

The journey and the fight that Gabayai's eight children undertake to recover their identities would not have been possible without the arrows their sister, Olowaili has, made for them. Inakeliginia's affirmation stresses that both Gabayai's sons and daughter worked together providing themselves with a path to learn about their mother, history and identity.

Inakeliginia reminds us of Olowaili's importance in her family and the important role she plays in their liberation: “*Olouaili formaba parte de la búsqueda de liberación de*

*los ocho hermanos*<sup>14</sup> (*Así lo vi*, p. 24). Contemporary Woman #1 also affirms her rightful place with her brothers and sisters declaring she has “the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes to fashion my own gods out of my entrails” (*Princess Pocahontas*, p. 59). Inakeligina also establishes that *Olowaili* used her own body, “*sus propios cabellos para tejer las flechas*”<sup>15</sup> (*Así lo vi*, p. 32). in her fight for freedom and dignity. Inakeliginia also emphasises the piercing relationship between arrows and words; Olowaili and her brothers “*tenían que llegar a vencerlos uno a uno y no solamente con las flechas y los arcos, sino con sus sabias palabras*”<sup>16</sup> (*Así lo vi*, p.44). Gabayai’s children use the arrow and the spoken word to overcome those who would try to erase their mother, their history and their identity from the face of the Earth. *Olowaili* and Contemporary Woman #1 shape weapons that come from their own bodies, their pain, as their words create their own path of identity that circumvent the stories of colonialism.

By placing indirect references to the name Olowaili and her own Guna heritage in transformation eight, the playwright affirms the personal value that she finds in her Guna culture and history. References to arrows, the number eight and the inna ritual demonstrate that Mojica uses her Guna name and heritage in the play to go beyond the histories of colonialism and assert that she is not a victim of the colonial encounter but rather one who works with her sisters and brothers to overcome it. Like Matoaka, Contemporary Woman #1 remembers her name and place as valued member of her community. Like La Malinche, she uses her words as a source of strength. She does not however, wish to impose her path on other indigenous women nor be a voice for all. “Now, I’d like you to take a good look... I don’t want to be mistaken for a crowd of Native women. I am one. And I do not represent all Native women. I am one” (*Princess Pocahontas*, p. 99). While Olowaili is a powerful image for Mojica, it should not be concluded that her story is meant to be a powerful image for all. As Jace Weaver notes “Every story – every myth – has ‘a pragmatic character’... Traditional Native American tribal myths are communal in character, forming identity, explaining one’s place in the cosmos, creating a sense of belonging” (*That the People Might Live*, p. 15). Weaver acknowledges that while these stories are shared with the community as a whole, they are to help individuals who wish to understand better how they belong to the community. Mojica stitches the story of Olowaili into *Princess Pocahontas* not to

privilege her history or way of belonging over another. It serves as a reminder to others that each Native community holds the stories, movements, sounds and ways of understanding that resurface in the each member. That member may choose to use those things in the manner they wish, when they need it the most.

In Guna culture, the concept of writing, movement and other forms of art are intimately connected to one another. Scholars from the Guna community such as Abadio Green Stocel have emphasized that reading and writing in the Guna culture is not relegated to just text but also to textiles and movements in daily living. In “*El lenguaje como legado de los dioses*,” Green observes that a person’s body, “*su manera de caminar, saltar, correr y nadar son escrituras que solamente este pueblo lo puede leer*”<sup>7</sup> (p. 326). Green expands the concepts of writing and reading beyond print or digital mediums to corporal motions, sounds sewing and wearing clothes. He notes: “*podemos afirmar que la escritura no solamente es el signo del habla, sino es el arte de pintar, de tejer, de ver de sentir, de escuchar, de vestirse*” (p. 328). He continues to explain that *molos* express an individual’s relationship to nature and culture as well as “*protección contra los espíritus que hacen la maldad*”<sup>8</sup> (p. 329). In this way it is possible to understand *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* as one of Mojica’s first *mola* text(ile)s: an expression of her relationship to nature and culture, but also protection against the spirits that do harm.

As Mari Lyn Salvador has noted in her studies of *mola* aesthetics, the stitches in the *molos* that Guna women sew are often intentionally made less evident in order to unite disparate layers of color, harmoniously drawing attention away from the individual parts to the composition as a whole. Consequently, imperceptible stitches often give a *mola*-maker acclaim. While the compositions and subjects of *molos* may be similar – although never exactly the same – each artist chooses her colorful layers, thread and how it is bound together in a distinct and careful manner that makes the *mola* identifiably her own (Art of Being Kuna, p. 179). Just as previous generations of *mola*-makers teach future ones to make small, neat stitches, Gloria Miguel (Mojica’s mother), Lisa Mayo and Muriel Miguel (Mojica’s aunts) have passed down their dramatic *mola* making techniques to the next generation. Following the advice from those who passed it down to her, Mojica neatly

conceals her own narrative stitches, making them imperceptible to those who have not been trained to read the language left behind in the meticulous actions of sewing a dramatic *mola*.

Mojica posed a question years after the publication of *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* about her relationship to colonialism in the article “Scoring the Body Through Kuna Aesthetic Principles: Indigenous Dramatic Arts in Theory Process and Practice” (2011), that deals with the motion of spinning and healing from past trauma. She asked, “can embodied memory and Indigenous ways of knowing and healing be channeled through a performative medium to ‘unwind’ and unlearn the traumas of colonization and genocide locked in the body?” In considering this quote, it may be useful to return to the scene in *Princess Pocahontas* where the character Contemporary Woman #1 invokes Pocahontas in the east, Malinche in the South, the Women of the Puna in the West and the Women who birthed the Métis in the North. The motions on stage mirror those of a compass needle pointing out the cardinal directions. It also serves as a watch hand going in a counter-clockwise fashion: a motion reminiscent of time going backwards or unwinding.

In this scene, although the character Contemporary Woman #1 invokes the 4 characters who are the subject of the 4 transfigurations, she also becomes the geographical center that spins around in every direction revealing the painful stories of abuse, abandonment and separation brought about by colonialism. It is no coincidence that Mojica herself played Contemporary Woman #1 in the original production. When she performs her dramatic *mola* onstage, Mojica placed herself physically in the center of each of these stories. Considering this scene from a geographical perspective, Mojica’s maternal grandfather, Antonio Miguel, was born in Panamá: the center of the American Continent. By placing herself center stage and spinning counterclockwise between east, north, west and south, Mojica’s movements and placement serve a double textual meaning. She centers herself in a place where an important part of her family’s story begins (Guna Yala, Panamá) and unwinds time in order to begin to reveal the other four text(ile)s that surround her.

The act of unraveling those narratives is clear in the initial two transformations of *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*; both deal with stereotypes of indigenous women

as well as a search for ways to move beyond them. Mark Shackleton has interpreted the character of the sacrificial corn maiden, “Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides” in the first transformation, as a “mocking reference to the stereotypical representations of Indian women as ‘Princesses’ in the world of advertising... a sexual fantasy and a dream of perfect assimilation” (p. 260). Shackleton sees Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides as a trickster who parodies the stereotypes of native women as seen on the packages of Land-o-Lakes butter and the Mazola Corn Oil Spread.

Taking this reading further, Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides’ subsequent leap into Niagara Falls and transformation into Contemporary Woman #1 can also be juxtaposed alongside the production of some *mola* designs that start out as commercial products. Salvador also has noted that in some *mola* designs “labels on cereal boxes, milk cartons, or matchboxes, and graphics from soft drink bottles and tobacco cans are copied, and appear as themes in molas” (*Art of Being Kuna*, p. 193-94). In the process of sewing one of these types of *mola*, the original commercial image on the package, mechanically replicated numerous times to make its contents more attractive for consumption is converted into a more personal expression. The *mola* maker takes that mass-produced image and places her own perspectives and feelings into the work, transforming it into something unique. The image, now translated onto the *mola* has *burba*: a Guna word for soul, a spirit or a breath of life (*Gayamar*, p. 35). The transformation of Princess-Buttered-on-Both-Sides by her leap into Niagara Falls and reappearance as Contemporary Woman #1 onstage is analogous to this same transformation of a *mola*. Both mass-produced, two-dimensional images are converted into new images that represent a woman who lives, breathes, has a soul and is creative. Whether by sewing a *mola* or creating a drama, Mojica, like other Guna women, take lifeless, repetitive images, unravel their initial purposes and give it an individualized meaning or spirit. In this way, the colonized objects are transformed into living subjects.

The transformation of the stereotypical image of the sacrificial corn maiden, Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides, into an empowered Contemporary Woman #1 is not as simple for Mojica as tossing away the old stereo types. Contemporary Woman #1 also searches for new ways to affirm her identity as a native woman beyond the stereo

typical role as Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides. In transformation two, Contemporary Woman #1 embarks on a journey with: “No map, no trail, no footprint, no way home, only darkness, a cold wind whistling by my ears. The only light comes from the stars” (p. 19). That Contemporary Woman #1 still sees a glimmer of light from the stars to guide her on her journey out of that darkness is an important indication that Mojica knows there is a place from which to begin a new identity despite centuries of stories of colonization.

The images of needle and thread, the compass needle and arrow have several connections to Mojica's other writings about the Guna cultural hero Olowaili. Contemporary Woman #1 invokes each of the four points, not starting with the north but with the east, a sign for dawn, for morning. Olowaili, the morning star or east, is the symbol for the dawn of a new day that would also be a favored direction to begin her journey. In the article “Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky way,” Mojica invokes Olowaili: “Her arms outstretched, fingers spread wide. She shows me her *molos*, neatly arranged in rows on the sand. She is proud of her work. She begins to spin faster and faster” (p. 124). In this passage, Olowaili is a *mola* maker, a sewer of complex expressions that are laid out before her. She proudly spins around in circles with her arms pointing to the stories in all directions she has brought together on the sand. Her hands become like the needle on a compass, proudly showing the narrator all of the *molos* or stories that stretch out before her in all directions. In a similar manner, Contemporary Woman #1 spins about the stage revealing the stories of four female entities from the central point where she stands. Mojica, through the images of *molos* and compasses fuses the figures of the compass needle, as well as the sewing needle into the likeness of Olowaili.

Mojica's positive expressions of hope for the future continue to resound in transformation 12 as Contemporary Woman #1 calls out ascending a ladder. “Stand me in the rain forest – my soul whispers, ‘home... home...’ Rise me above the rain forest – I know that every ray of filtered light that ripples in the living green” (*Princess Pocahontas*, p. 55). Contemporary Woman #1 is transported to a lush green rainforest as though she were the seed of a tree, planted in the soil of her home. She rises towards the light of the brightest star in the sky, amongst the green of all other vegetation: a sharp contrast from the dark night and cold wind and only light of the stars to guide her in the

opening transformations. Olowaili: the morning star, her compass, her arrow, her needle, the name she has sought out and found has guided her home. Her story will continue on.

This is not the only stitch of story in Mojica's dramatic *mola* that speaks of the continuance of life. In transformation 2, Contemporary Woman #1 speaks of how her indigenous blood continues to flow from generation to generation as she tells the story of her birth and the birth of her own children. She speaks of how her mother turned her over "to check for the blue spot at the base of the spine – the sign of Indian blood. When my child was born, after counting the fingers and toes I turned it over to check for the blue spot at the base of the spine. Even among the half-breeds it's one of the last things to go" (*Princess Pocahontas*, p. 20). The blue spot links her identity to the generations before her and the generations to come. Her heritage lives on in her blood and is passed down to her children. They have survived and will continue to do so.

*Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* is more than a weaving of other women's stories spoken through Mojica. It is not a one size fits all garment for all Native women to wear. It is one of Mojica's best stitched dramatic *molos*. In this text(ile), Mojica carefully conceals her own needlework, her own story about Olowaili to allow the disparate layers of colors and stories fuse together into a beautiful composition. One may appreciate a *mola* without ever looking at the painstaking needlework a Guna woman uses to make this garment. Similarly, one may read *Princess Pocahontas* and provide a very cogent reading without focusing on the individual stitches of the Guna naming ritual, the spoken words in the Guna language and the cultural heroine Olowaili hidden within the drama. Yet, by studying that individual strand of Mojica's thread and its rise and fall through layers of narrative, it is possible appreciate both the final product of the work of art, and the *burba* or breath of life left behind by its creator. Those who perceive that needlework and the dedication of generations who taught it to others may pass it on to future generations, not so they can replicate the same garment, but use it as a guide in their own individual expressions of identity and belonging.

Mojica's Guna name Olowaili, although never uttered in the play, resounds clearly as a narrative thread throughout *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, making this dramatic *molaa* clear expression of her life narrative. The sounds and motions on

stage are the embodied needle and thread of her life narrative used to sew together the layers of stories into a magnificently complex composition of color and form. The stories which Mojica has stitched together no longer are bound to the histories of colonization, rupture and separation. They are centered by the compass needle, the sewing needle, the morning star, and the arrows of *Olowaili*. Through the drama, Mojica over comes Gueloyai's colonizing history, creating a *mola* that is comfortable for her to wear and her protection against harmful spirits. Hermolamay not fit other native women or even other Guna women, but it may serve as inspiration for others to unravel the text(iles) that do not fit them and begin to create their own.

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## Notes

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- <sup>2</sup> A mola is the traditional blouse worn by indigenous Guna women. It is comprised of the upper section of the blouse, and a lower section. The lower section has two panels on front and back. The panels have several layers of fabric sewn together using a reverse appliqué method. In sewing the lower panels, the maker cuts out shapes from the top layers of fabric and places other layers of fabric underneath. The themes of these panels may be geometric shapes or even representation of objects, people and animals from everyday life. Tourists who visit Panama often purchase the lower panels, which are separated from the upper part of the blouse. They frame them or include them in their own needlework, appreciating them for their artful designs and needlework.
- <sup>3</sup> When the only daughter of the eight children, Olouaili, grew up and became a woman, she began to weave the couplings for the arrows and bows. The arrows created by the young Olouaili did not break, they were born of the pain of the eight children... In this manner, the arrows came out sharp and strong.
- <sup>4</sup> Olouaili formed part of the children's search for liberation.
- <sup>5</sup> Her own hair to weave the arrows.
- <sup>6</sup> Had to defeat them one by one and not only with their arrows and bows, but with their wise words.
- <sup>7</sup> Their way of walking, jumping, running and swimming are writings that only this community can read.
- <sup>8</sup> Protection against the spirits that do evil.