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Developing Destinies

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Review. Developing Destinies.

Rogoff, B. (2011). *Developing destinies. A Mayan midwife and town*. New York: Oxford University Press.

" Developing destinies is a piece of the work that Barbara Rogoff initiated more than three decades ago in close collaboration with Chona, a Mayan woman from the San Pedro community (Guatemala) who knew her destiny from the very first day of her life: becoming a midwife for her community.

" In her analysis, Barbara Rogoff combines the life story of Chona, the cultural practices of the community of San Pedro where Chona lives, and Chona's perspective on cultural traditions to elaborate a view of culture as a form of community life, as something dynamic, and as receiving continuous influence from individuals when they engage in community activities. Rogoff illustrates these features with rich examples from Chona's life, her family, and the San Pedro community.

" The background theme throughout the book is the influence that elements of a new society have in the perpetuation or change of traditional cultural practices, such as those developed in San Pedro thirty years ago. In this process, culture becomes dynamic and changes from generation to generation. Another central message derived from this is that in order to understand individuals it is essential to take culture as a starting point, since people "are" in relation to their cultural practices.

Cultural participation in multiple practices or "cultural constellations" are intimately related to how individuals develop and change from generation to generation. To illustrate this, Rogoff shows that today, in biology classes, children in San Pedro learn where babies come from.

This is a quite new situation, since forty years ago the majority of children in San Pedro did not receive formal schooling and completely ignored those questions as in the community those issues were taboo. Thus, the cultural practice of formal schooling has transformed individuals and the dynamics of the community at once. Other elements that have contributed to such transformation are the improvement of transportation, Internet access, and the involvement in other occupations besides housework and agriculture.

" In the midst of these changes, one of Chona's worries is the lost of the midwife activity according to the Mayan tradition, given the medicalization and application of Western medicine to traditional midwife practices. Responding to this concern, indeed, one of the main motivations of this book is to leave in writing the ancestral midwife practices that have left a print on the cultural practices of these indigenous communities. Rogoff does this brilliantly through gathering the voice of one of the main characters in this activity, one of the few still remaining Mayan midwives in San Pedro.

" Chona's life story, through the accomplishment of her destiny, is still an example of how frequently a constellation of practices seems, over time, replacing others, instead of enriching constellations of practices between them. Indeed, throughout the book is evident the confrontation between Mayan tradition and the invasion of the Western culture through power relations that eventually exclude the cultural practices that the inhabitants of San Pedro have experienced for so long. In relation to this, Rogoff claims that still children of the indigenous community of San Pedro have knowledge of the cultural constellations of their community, because there is no difference between the life of adults and the life of children, contrary to what happens in non-indigenous communities. In San Pedro, children are included in all the activities of adults, this is how they learn through their shared destinies between generations, such as the case of Chona's granddaughter and herself, who despite sharing the same destiny -becoming midwives- the cultural reality of their generation is very different.

The lesson to take home from this thorough book about development in context is that we assume, adopt, transform or reject the cultural practices of our community in the measure in which we participate in them. And when we transform cultural practices, we make them part of

our future development and that of others. This way: *our generation's inventions and patchwork solutions to today's issues become tomorrow's cultural traditions, along with whatever our generation carries forward from people who lived before* (Rogoff, 2011, p.292).

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