

Mid-Term Report: Robin Rigby Trust
Dolores LeVangie, May 2010

Title: Islands of Medicine: “Islandness”, Post-colonialism and Medical Systems on the Island of Chiloé, Chile.

Revised Project Description:

Since my time on Chiloe Island I have adapted my project to the current situation here and the work of the Williche Council of Chiefs’ Health Program. Within the past year the Council of Chiefs has been working with the municipality of Quellon which is the most southern city on the Island, to integrate the Williche Health Program (WHP) with Public Health Services. The Williche health team now travels to Quellon twice a month to three different clinics, once a month to a smaller island, Puqueldon, and holds a weekend of health attention in their own centre once a month. Given the new system of an intercultural and integrated health project doctors, nurses, psychologists, midwives and nutritionists now refer their patients to the services of the WHP. The Williche Health Program now serves a wider range of the population and the use of original therapies has grown.

Due to the changes with the WHP I am now focusing on the integration between the the Williche Health Program and the Public Health System on Chiloe. I will be interviewing different groups of people: various members of the Williche community and the health team of the WHP; several public service employees of the clinics that the WHP now works with, including doctors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers; and directors within the public health care system, including the present and former Director of Health for the province of Chiloe. I am also still investigating the how the Williche cosmovision influences their health program and what health means to them.

My thesis will examine how the Williche Council of Chiefs has integrated their health program and the concept of “Küme Mogen Rüpü (a path to balance)” into the public health care system on Chiloé Island. This is an example of two medical systems working together to form a complementary picture of health care that benefits both the indigenous and non-indigenous population on the island. The research problem for my thesis is how island medical systems and concepts of wellness and disease have been impacted by post-colonialism, and modernity. The definition of an island medical system is any system or manner of taking care of the wellbeing of the people who live on that island, whether it be original therapies from the Indigenous people who live on that island to the public health system that is organized by the state and supplies a form of biomedicine.

Overall Objectives:

- a) to learn about indigenous island communities that currently practice medical plurality by doing field based / community based research in Chiloe and utilizing literature research and analysis on the Pacific;
- b) to examine the dichotomy of original healing methods (including cosmovisions and ethnobotany) versus biomedical concepts of healing;

c) and to deconstruct the concept of “Healthy Islands” as stated by the World Health Organization.

Goal: To show that islands can increase their level of well-being by practicing a form of medical plurality and that this should represent a balance between the different medical systems. That a healthy islands plan needs to be representative of the “openness, flexibility and pluralistic” nature of island cultures (Burns McGrath). That the implementation of a healthy islands action plan needs to represent a system of medical plurality and should be inclusive of indigenous concepts of health and well-being.

Specific Ethnographic Objectives:

- a) to learn about the cosmovision of the Williche and how this influences their program of health
- b) to learn how and why the Chilean public health system has incorporated the Williche health program into their system.
- c) to investigate what the concepts “health”, “cure”, and “illness” mean for both Williche people and Chilotes
- d) to investigate what the perceived causes of illness are and how this influences the treatment for the illness
- e) to learn what the connections are between the land/island, health and identity for the Williche and Chilotes

Activities under taken to date:

- 3 Weeks of Spanish language lessons
- Reviewed and revised project objectives and details
- Researched various journal articles and the World Health Organizations “Healthy Islands Plan”
- Presented my project to the Williche Council of Chiefs
- Attendance of an English class at the University of ARCIS where I spoke about my project
- Spent 5 days at the Grand Chiefs’ house which is located on one of the smaller islands
- Various activities with the Williche health team: assisting with the various days of attention; attending meetings; helping to bottle remedies
- Identified participants for interviews and developed rapport with the various members of the WHP and also employees at the various clinics
- Currently doing interviews and organizing more
- Visited the Office of Chiloe’s Public Health System and met with various employees
- Attended a meeting with the Director of Health for the Province of Chiloe

Next Steps:

During the next seven weeks I will continue my fieldwork on Chiloe, this includes participant observation, assisting the WHP, interviewing participants, transcribing and analyzing interviews.