
Robin Rigby Trust

Final Report

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ISLANDS OF MEDICINE: EXPLORING NOSOLOGY AND NISSOLOGY ON THE ISLAND OF CHILOÉ, CHILE.



Left to Right: Stairs leading to Williche Council of Chief's Health Centre; Castro Harbour; Health Clinic in Quellon.

This report is for the funds that were granted to Dolores LeVangie for her master's research entitled: *Islands of Medicine: Exploring nosology and nissology on the Island of Chiloé*,¹ at the University of Prince Edward Island. In March, 2010 I arrived at the Island of Chiloé, Chile to complete the fieldwork portion of my master's degree. I lived on the island for four months and studied with the Williche Council of Chiefs' Intercultural Health Program (WCCIHP). This award winning health program focuses on including Williche ancestral remedies and other therapies to create balance in a person's life. The program has also recently started health rounds in clinics within the Public Health Care System in Chiloé; the two are working together to form a complementary intercultural health system that benefits both the indigenous and non-indigenous population. My thesis is examining the relationship between these two medical systems and the need for complementary intercultural health care on islands. Funding from the Robin Rigby Trust allowed me to travel overseas and complete my fieldwork.

¹Nosology is the study of disease and nissology is the study of islands.

Background:

The archipelago of Chiloé is found off the mid-southern coast of Chile. It contains the largest island being 189 km long and 56–64 km wide, roughly the width of Prince Edward Island, with a population of around 150,000 "Chilotes" (Hutchinson Encyclopedia 2008). The earliest sign of human activity in this area dates back to 14,600 calendar years before the present (Dillehay et al., 2008). The current indigenous population are the Williche people. The main island is surrounded with more than 30 smaller islands to which the Williche claim as their territory. The West side of the island meets the cold and rough Pacific Ocean and the east is separated from the mainland by the Chacao channel, which was “formerly the outlet for an ancient lake ... When this area submerged, Chiloé was changed into an island,” (Subercaseaux 1971:200). This has created an area rich in resources such as fertile volcanic soil, coastal temperate rain forest, an inland sea, and a coastline dotted with coves and inlets.

In Chile “indigenous communities have lived in frequent conflict with the administration of the natural areas ... the demand for ancestral rights to the land and the natural resources (water, fauna, flora) are the most controversial issues” (Oltremari and Jackson 2006:216). For the Williche Council of Chiefs issues of rights to land and natural resources go hand in hand with the right to take care of the health of their people. The Williche worldview is referred to as the cosmovision and it is how they relate and inter-relate with the world. Their grand council of chiefs plays an important role in dealings with the state over the themes of territory, land rights, access to resources, environmental issues, health and education. In order to provide a vision of health that is based on their cosmovision the WCC created an intercultural health program.



Above: Chilean Coast
Right: Chiloé Island



Summary of the Project Proposal:

My original project proposal was written with the impression that knowledge and use of local plants and seaweeds as remedies was declining among the Williche. However with the WCC own intercultural Health Program and its current involvement with the Public Health Care System there is a greater demand for their remedies than previously. Even though some adjustments to my fieldwork were made to better suit the needs of my host organization, my project still looked at how the Williche use traditional medicine in their health system and how their health program benefits the archipelago's coastal communities. The reason why I applied for funding through the Robin Rigby Trust is that I believe my project suits the goals of the trust; the use of local plants and seaweeds as remedies is intricately tied to the development and sustainability of the many coastal communities in the archipelago of Chiloé. The use and availability of these remedies is linked to environmental, socio-economic and coastal management. Part of the importance in caring for ones environment is that it plays a large role in sustaining indigenous knowledge: when indigenous peoples have access to natural resources they are able to practice their traditions and lifestyle; many traditions keep and teach the uses of natural resources in a sustainable way; people who are able to practice their traditions and culture have a healthy well-being; those with a healthy well-being are able to take care of themselves, their families, their communities and their environment. Within the realm of indigenous knowledge are other relevant topics such as sustainable forest management, holistic medicine, food security and cultural survival.

Data collected from the Island of Chiloé will be compared with islands in the Pacific region through literary sources; focusing on how these different island populations think about health. I will be examining indigenous healing therapies and how these have been effected by capitalism and modernization (bio-medicine). Objectives of the research are: to deconstruct the concept of “Healthy Islands” as stated by WHO; to examine the dichotomy between biomedicine and indigenous ancestral medicine; and to learn first and second hand about how indigenous island communities think about health. The importance of this research is two fold: first it will contribute to the academic literature of island studies and medical anthropology by exploring the practice of medical plurality (more than one medical system) on islands; second, the research will contribute to the geographical breadth of Island Studies by centring on the Island of Chiloé. The project will also bring to light the challenges that the Williche face around the use of natural resources such as: salmon farms, aquaculture, and land rights.

Implementation of the Project:

This project was implemented based on a previous relationship that arose out of an internship with the WCC in 2007. During that time I lived in Chiloé for five months and investigated Williche uses of seaweed. The linkages between the Institute of Island Studies, UPEI and the University of ARCIS, Chiloé also contributed to the project. In the early stages of designing my thesis research I was in contact with Manuel Munoz, Director of the WCCIHP, and asked if I would be welcome to return to Chiloé and work with the health program for my research. The Council of Chiefs sent a letter of support in

the Fall of 2009, stating that they would welcome my return. In November of 2009 Manuel Munoz travelled to UPEI as a guest of the Institute of Island Studies and during this time we were able to discuss my project. When I arrived in Chiloé, I knew that my project would be revolving around the work of the WCCIHP and that Manuel would be the host supervisor.

Before I was able to start doing field research (in-depth interviews, participant observation, informal conversations) my project had to be approved by the WCC. I was then able to assist their health team and complete my fieldwork. Throughout the course of my four months in Chiloé I frequently meet with Manuel to discuss the direction and progress of my project, and potential people to interview. By working with the WCCIHP I was able to build rapport with the health team members, as well as various workers in Chiloé clinics whom I also interviewed. Connections made with the Department of Health for the province of Chiloé also led to interviews within the department and resource materials. I would be welcomed to return to Chiloé once again and would like to present my master's research in Chiloé, if I am able to secure funding for the travel.

Accomplishments:

What I achieved from my overseas research was the collection of primary data for my master's degree, which was one of the objectives for my thesis: to learn about indigenous island communities that currently practice medical plurality by doing community based research. During my four months overseas I received project approval from the WCC, conducted 16 in-depth interviews, assisted with 20 health rounds of the WCCIHP and gave an informal class presentation at the University of ARCIS. I also became more fluent in Spanish and completed 50 class hours in a language school.

Development of Protocols etc for Further or Sustained Cooperation.

Working with an indigenous community requires a set of protocols that comes from within the community and should be respected by the researcher. Each community or group may have a different set of protocols. As a researcher it is important to learn about the ethical considerations that indigenous groups have and to understand past situations and experiences that may have had a negative effect on the community, often tainting their view towards research. It is important to address these concerns and also to have the groups cooperation and permission to work within their programs or communities. While some communities will accept an ethics review from a university, others will have their own research ethics guidelines to follow. For Canadian universities the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2010) has a section specifically for doing research with aboriginal communities.

A rising concern for indigenous communities in regards to research is that the researcher comes from outside of the community and it is the researcher and not the community who benefits from the research. Often individuals within the community who have contributed to the project are not recognized for their contribution. Co-publishing articles with a community member is one way to resolve this. Also the community may

want to have a community report that is accessible to all members in the community. By following these recommendations a researcher is taking the steps necessary to sustain a relationship that both parties benefit from.

The Williche Grand Chief, Don Armando and I.



Ongoing Activities Resulting From the Research Study Period Abroad:

In September, 2010 I presented a paper at the first annual Decolonizing Indigenous Health Research Conference, in Niagara Falls, Ontario. I will be looking to co-publish an article with my host supervisor, based on this paper. In the coming Spring I will be submitting an abstract to present another paper at the Canadian Anthropology Society Conference. My thesis will be completed within the 2011 academic year and there is ongoing discussion about a separate report for the host supervisor. The Robin Rigby Trust will receive a copy of my thesis upon its completion.

Replication:

I would strongly recommend the repetition or replication of this project, with the same organization and also to be undertaken elsewhere. If the project were to be repeated with the Williche Council of Chiefs on the Island of Chiloé there are some changes that I would recommend. The health program has a large amount of data that would need to be run through SPSS or similar software, to produce statistical analysis for the program. Other changes would depend on what the situation was with the WCCIHP. When I arrived in Chiloé I adapted my project to also include the work between the WCCIHP and the Public Health Service in Chiloé. The new complementary, intercultural health system had only been in place since January 2010.

The importance of replicating this project elsewhere is in collecting primary data that can be used to benefit the needs of the indigenous or non-indigenous coastal community. The relationship “between economic development and the management of the very fragile physical environment of the islands is intimately bound up with the present and future health status...health is much more overtly considered as a resource in itself, and is seen from an holistic perspective” (Nutbeam 1996:263). By understanding the different concepts, approaches, and needs of health in coastal communities, a health program that better suits their needs can be constructed. When a person is in good health they are then able to address environmental, socio-economic and coastal management problems. In addition to this is understanding how environmental, socio-economic and

coastal management problems affect a persons well-being and are often the cause of illnesses in coastal communities.

Time:

Given that this was not my first time in Chiloé nor working with the WCC, four months was sufficient to accomplish my project objectives. I would recommend that if the project was to be replicated more than four months may be necessary to establish rapport with an organization, and become familiar with the culture. The season that I worked in Chiloé was from March to June which is their fall season. While the weather would have been more agreeable from December to February, it may be more difficult to get a project off the ground during their summer months.

Cooperation:

Cooperation was integral to the project implementation; when working overseas one needs to remember that they are a guest of the host organization and that they are also serving as a representative of Canada. To have good intercultural communication and experiences, the researcher should be able to adapt to the culture, be willing to have new experiences and have awareness of the socio-economic situations of the area and people. Included in these are the skills of empathy, humility, flexibility, patience, openness and a good sense of humor. The ability and desire to listen to the communities needs and situations is also important. The last thing a host organization needs is an arrogant researcher who thinks they know how to solve all the problems, after being involved for only a short period of time. I feel that language also contributes to cooperation, showing that you are at least interested in learning the language, even if only a few keys words, is greatly appreciated and acknowledged.

All of the skills I have listed will enhance future working relations because they allow you to grow as an individual and understand the complexities of working within another culture. Adaptability, willingness and awareness are three skills that will help you adjust to numerous situations and allow you to develop personal relationships. All three of these also contribute to interpersonal skills which are key for any type of social research.

Linkages:

From my recent experience in Chiloé I improved personal existing linkages with the Williche Council of Chiefs and ARICIS University. I also developed new linkages with the ministry of health for the province of Chiloé and a non-governmental environmental organization, Fundación con Todos. This NGO has various projects with the WCC and through meetings of the council I became better acquainted with them. The University of ARICIS has had an ongoing relationship with the University of Prince Edward Island and being a graduate student from UPEI and having ARICIS as a host organization has strengthened the linkages between the two. I believe there will be more academic exchanges between them in the future. Because I have experience with the

WCC, I believe this may assist me in working with Aboriginal Canadian coastal communities. I can also link the WCC with groups in Canada so that they could create a partnership or project.

Sustainability:

One outcome of my project in Chiloé was the connection I made between a Canadian landscape architect in Chiloé and the value of planting local plants and trees that are used to make remedies. This architect was working with the municipality of Quellon (where the WCCIHP attends health clinics) to create an urban park. We discussed the importance of creating a green space in the city that would contain the various plants, herbs and trees Chilotes use on a daily basis for food and remedies. I connected the architect with the director of the WCCIHP so that they may work together in creating a green space that would promote and sustain the use of natural resources. The insight into sustaining and protecting an environment where plants and trees with medicinal properties flourish is intricately tied to the development of the many coastal communities on the island of Chiloé.

Photo taken from one of the smaller islands where the use of aquaculture is heavy.



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I would like to thank Doug and Mary Rigby for establishing the Robyn Rigby Trust and for funding the overseas portion of my master's research. This funding allowed me to travel to Chile and live there for four months without being a financial burden to my host organization. I would also like to express my gratitude to the trust for quickly processing the paper work so that I could receive the funds at the beginning of trip. Being able to travel to Chiloé and work with the Williche Council of Chiefs for a second time was rewarding on so many levels. My attachment to Chiloé is now stronger than it was before and I know that Chiloé will always be a part of my life.

Muchas gracias por todos [Thank you for everything],

Dolores LeVangie

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