



# The Applied Anthropologist

ISSN 0882-4894

VOLUME 35

NUMBER 2

2015

## Table of Contents

### ○ POINT—TO—POINT

3

### ○ FEATURED ARTICLES

Prioritizing Values: Negotiating the Interface between Tradition and Development with  
Water Exportation in Dominica

**Evelyn Pickering**..... 4

Reflections from the Field: Voice in Cross-Cultural and Transdisciplinary Research

**Arren Mendezona Allegretti**..... 11

Equity, Development, and Conservation: An Analysis of *Chambira* Palm Use in the  
Northwest Amazon

**Daniel Bauer**..... 17

The Little Apple: Ethnic Conflict, Educational Challenges, and Socioeconomic Struggles in a  
Bosnian Town – A Longitudinal Study

**Peter W. Van Arsdale, Leslie P. Woodward, and Velma Šarić** ..... 27

Language Revitalization among the Ch'orti's (Mayas)

**Robin Quizar**..... 35

Cultural Rituals: Healing from an Indigenous Perspective

**Ramon del Castillo**..... 40

### ○ COMMENTARIES

The *despedida* for Diana Velasquez, *curandera*

**Ramon del Castillo**..... 46

Utz Ak'asleamar: Holistic Health in San Marcos La Laguna

**Ian Bonesteel**..... 49

A Note on the Applied Anthropologist as Healer

**Howard F. Stein**..... 56

# The Applied Anthropologist



## 2015 OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

### HIGH PLAINS SOCIETY FOR APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY

Kathleen Van Vlack, President [2015-2017]

David Piacenti, President-Elect [2015-2017]

Shawn Kelley, Past President [2015-2017]

Michael Brydger, Treasurer [2012-2016]

Melanie Archuleta, Secretary [2015-2017]

Stephen O. Stewart, Editor *The Applied Anthropologist* [2013-2016]

Andrea Akers, Managing Editor, *The Applied Anthropologist* [2011-2016]

Saniego Sanchez, Member-at-Large [2014-2017]

Rebecca Forgash, Member-at-Large [2013-2016]

Howard Stein, Member-at-Large [2013-2016]

Liz Moore, Student Member-at-Large [2015-2017]

David Piacenti, Nominations and Elections Committee Chair [2014-2016]

Vacant, Finance Committee Chair and Archivist

Rebecca Forgash, Publications Policy Committee Chair [2014-2017]

Andrea Akers, Webmaster—*ex officio* [2013-2016]

### MISSION STATEMENT OF *THE APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGIST*

*The Applied Anthropologist* publishes peer-reviewed articles, commentaries, brief communications, field reports, and book reviews on a wide range of topics. The journal's focus is on cultural change and adaptation in the modern world. It explores how humans approach, analyze, and develop solutions to cultural, ecological, economic, and technological problems. The journal is supported and underwritten by the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology. Guidelines for authors and electronic access to back issues are available on the website or by contacting Managing Editor Andrea Akers at [andrea.akers.mader@gmail.com](mailto:andrea.akers.mader@gmail.com) or Editor-in-Chief Stephen O. Stewart at [stephen.o.stewart@gmail.com](mailto:stephen.o.stewart@gmail.com). Further information about the society is available at [www.HPSfAA.org](http://www.HPSfAA.org).

# The Applied Anthropologist

Vol. 35

No. 2

2015

## POINT—TO—POINT

STEPHEN O. STEWART

The current issue of *The Applied Anthropologist* is a rich and varied presentation of research and other contributions by individuals concerned with and focused on applied anthropology in its many aspects. Our journal is truly international, with articles dealing with Mongolia, Dominica, the Amazon, Bosnia, and Mesoamerica, as well as the United States.

The topics of the research are tremendously relevant to today's world. Water is an increasingly scarce resource in many places in the world, affecting agriculture, health, and many other aspects of life, but it is not scarce everywhere, as Pickering's article on Dominica shows. But an abundance of water brings up questions of how to allocate such a resource and at what price. Applied anthropologists and others are also concerned about the increasing impact of extractive industries on indigenous people in the developing world. Bauer's article on the use of the *chambira* palm in the Northwest Amazon details how the planting, processing, and use of a locally available plant and cultigen can provide a sustainable source of income for indigenous people in an area of Peru under siege for timber and petroleum extraction.

The article by Van Arsdale et. al. on Bosnia reminds us of the many horrors of modern ethnic war in the world and the important role of applied anthropologists in documenting the responses to those conflicts along with the successes and failures of the local populations to recover and return to prosperity. This research is especially interesting in that it was carried out over more than a decade and provides the perspective of a truly long term applied research effort. The research by Allegretti from Mongolia provides an excellent example of the difficulties involved in carrying out research in a different country and culture with research teams made up of people with varied backgrounds.

There are two articles focused on Mayan culture, the first by Quizar on language revitalization among the Ch'orti', a community that is essentially an island of Mayans surrounded by non-Mayans (*Ladinos*) that represent a constant pressure for cultural and language change in the direction of the majority culture. The second article by Bonesteel is an ambitious intent to penetrate local Kaqchikel thinking concerning health through an understanding of Kaqchikel terminology regarding

what goes into healthy living. The article unfortunately brought to light problems in working with a non-Western and unwritten language without proper linguistic training. Still, the understanding Bonesteel sought is key for health professionals working in indigenous communities to be able to operate in effective preventative health and not just to cure symptoms.

Ramon del Castillo has provided two excellent contributions to the journal, again in the area of health and the importance of working through indigenous practitioners to bring meaningful relief to people whose health orientation is non-Western. He provides us with a beautiful and insightful portrait of an indigenous health practitioner – a *curandera* – who develops a path into a public health institution to provide services for all. Del Castillo then adds a moving and culturally appropriate poetic farewell to the *curandera* Diana Velásquez.

This issue contains one wonderful contribution by the poet laureate of the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology, Howard Stein. This man has, it seems, a unique ability to combine applied anthropology and poetry in the deepest and most creative ways to leave the reader always with a better understanding of the human condition. As always, thank you, Howard.

Finally, *The Applied Anthropologist* would like to thank the following dedicated reviewers for assisting us through the peer review of articles for this issue: Lane Volpe, Rebecca Forgash, Arthur Campa, Kyra Sandstrom, David Piacenti, Lenora Bohren, Michael Brydge, Kreg Ettenger, Howard Stein, Neil Henderson, Clare Boulanger, Tassie Hirshfeld, Mayte Tellechea, and Thomas Larsen.

# The Applied Anthropologist

Vol. 35  
No. 2  
2015

## PRIORITIZING VALUES: NEGOTIATING THE INTERFACE BETWEEN TRADITION AND DEVELOPMENT WITH WATER EXPORTATION IN DOMINICA

EVELYN PICKERING

### ABSTRACT

Water is a distinguishing feature of Dominica, because it is such an abundant resource. Since pre-Columbian occupation, people living on the island have developed an extensive knowledge basis regarding water use and management. Dominican people identify a wide range of water types on the island and each type has specific uses. The island topography stimulates heavy rainfall, and the resource has been traditionally understood as shared property. Currently, an interface exists between opposing values on Dominica. This article examines how the resource is culturally constructed, the prioritization of environmental or economic values, and emerging threats of climate change.

**KEY WORDS:** Water Use, Water Knowledge, Environmental Values, Water Exportation, Economic Development, Dominica, Caribbean, Climate Change, Natural Resources, Traditional Ecological Knowledge

### Introduction

Water is a necessity of life. For thousands of years, all over the world, human populations have sought out this precious resource. Recently, there has been an increase in literature surrounding climate change and water, which commonly focuses on deserts or places experiencing drought. In contrast, this article will discuss some of the deeply rooted and complex cultural connections observed on an island that currently has an abundance of water, but is facing serious threats associated with impending climatic shifts.

The Commonwealth of Dominica (Figure 1) is a relatively large island in the Lesser Antilles of the Caribbean. Dominica has a uniquely high biodiversity and low human population. According to the 2014 census, the population of the island of Dominica was 73,449. Dominica has been acknowledged for a mountainous volcanic landscape, plentiful water resources, and lush flora and fauna.

Steep mountains support heavy rainfall that nourishes the island, and reaches the ocean via hundreds of rivers and streams. When describing their island, Dominican people largely emphasize elements of the natural landscape; *Nature Island* and *The Island of 365 Rivers* are synonymous

for Dominica. The water resources of Dominica are treasured and have been incorporated into the daily life and culture of the island.



Figure 1: The Commonwealth of Dominica





## Water Management on Dominica

Water on Dominica is viewed as a communal property, however, The Department of Land, Housing, Settlements, and Water Resources officially manages the resource. The Dominican Water and Sewage Company Ltd. (DOAWASCO) distributes running tap water to 95% of the island (Personal Communication 2013). The tap water facilitated by DOWASCO is provided at the monthly rate of, "\$10.12 [Eastern Caribbean Dollars] per 1000 gallons," which is equivalent to \$3.75 [United States Dollars] (DOWASCO 2011). Based on the generous support from existing customers, DOAWASCO provides other services, including:

Free water for public conveniences, centenarians, fire fighting and cleaning the city streets, as well as its efforts to maintain and expand the supply and distribution network island-wide, so that the Company can continue to perform its mandated role in water resource management and in contributing to national development (DOWASCO 2011).

The notion that people should always have consistent access to quality water is not new to Dominica.

Within the historical memory and contemporary experiences of the people of Dominica, there has always been an abundance of water on the island. Overtime, the cultural perspective that water should be communally shared because there is an abundance has become common across the island. Other strong cultural values contribute to the generous approach towards natural resources. For example, "In this predominately Catholic country, any activity that engages in the distribution of goods that would otherwise go to waste is in some manner divinely sanctioned as an appropriately moral use of God's resources" (Mantz 2007: 28). The way that Dominicans perceive water has impacted the way it is used, managed, and most recently, exported.

Evidently, because many Dominican citizens and government officials support the epistemological concept that water is a communal resource and should be shared, the boundaries have been expanded and the country has begun to donate and sell millions of gallons of water to foreign countries, by means of natural disaster relief, water bottle industries, and tourism ships. Dominica has long been valued for its natural resources. Beginning with the indigenous populations living of the island (Honychurch 1995), Dominica's verdant environment has attracted humans. Historically, the Dominican government has attempted to sell natural resources several times, however, "As a study by Dominican Cecilia Green bluntly put it, 'Dominica has generally had poor luck with enclave industries'" (Honychurch 1995). For decades, Dominica has made efforts to establish a successful industry, and

because the island has an abundance of natural resources, extraction and exportation have been promoted. An interesting threshold, however, has been reached between the social construction of water and its potential for economic development on the island (Figure 2).

Culturally, Dominicans feel a moral responsibility to share their abundant water resources with regions lacking high quality or quantity water. However, Dominica has struggled economically for decades, and the rising global demand for pure water presents an opportunity for development. Bulk water exportation is inherently problematic, and the social reliance on water and threats of climate change further complicate the endeavor. Dominica's inimitable and generous cultural standpoint on water



**Figure 2: Penstock Tube Transporting Water for Domestic Distribution and Export (Photo Credit John Hains)**





adds complexity to the multidimensional social, cultural, political, and environmental factors involved in water-use perceptions and decision making.

## Research Methods

The aim of this case study (Pickering 2014) is to explore the cultural meaning of water on Dominica, how Dominican people feel about exporting water, and environmental or climatic changes Dominica has experienced recently. Topics to address these larger themes include: water usage, perceived water availability, water ownership, water sales, common knowledge of exportation and lease agreements, environmental predictability, and experiences of environmental change. The cultural meaning of water on Dominica can be understood through the acknowledgment of different types of water and how they can be used for different purposes.

An understanding of these concepts was developed through literature reviews and ethnographic research. Between 2013 and 2014, a total of 52 interviews were recorded. In 2013, seven informal interviews took place. In 2014, 32 formal interviews and 13 informal interviews were conducted. These semi-guided conversations consisted of 19 open-ended questions that addressed the research topic points. The information documented throughout these conversations explores a homogenous knowledge domain regarding water on Dominica. The respondents were selected through a snowball sample, and were stratified by gender, age (18-50 or 50+), and community residence (rural or urban). Responses were analyzed through mixed methods, with an emphasis on qualitative evaluation.

## Findings

Dominican people have a sophisticated expertise and attachment to water resources. Within mainstream Dominican culture, there is an intricate knowledge domain of water and environment, as well as a widely accepted belief that because the island produces an abundance of water, their community has a moral obligation to share the surplus. The cultural comprehension of water is complex and richly nuanced.

### Water Knowledge in Dominica

One way in which the cultural connection to water was displayed was through the extensive knowledge regarding types and uses provided during interviews. Interviewees identified 20 different types of water when asked about the types of water that could be found on the island. Table 1 provides a list of the different types of water identified and some of the documented uses.

In this study (Pickering 2014), Dominican people provided information that demonstrated an extensive awareness and understanding of water resources. Dominican people recognize and use a wide variety of water resources. Knowledge of this water has developed over a long period of time, and is a significant part of Dominica culture. Dominican cultural perceives and utilizes the wide variety of water types on the island in different ways. For instance, sulfur water can be used to treat

skin or digestive conditions, seawater has similar medicinal properties, and rural communities often collect rainwater for drinking purposes. One respondent provided a detailed explanation of uses for several different types of water on Dominica.

Well the sea is basically used for fishing (Figure 3). That's the number one thing people do with the sea. It's also used for tourism, recreational purposes. I only have to put the positives? Because pollution, I have to include that. People just throw a lot of stuff in it. Okay, fresh river is used for bottling. We have water-bottling companies here. Also recreational, people go there to bathe and stuff. Even fishing also, certain areas have certain types of fish people go over to get. They call them crawfish and stuff like that also. Sulfur water, what I've heard, is used for medicinal purposes, like if you have a rash or anything like that you could go there, also to clean the pores of your skin, recreational, again, people just go there to relax and stuff, and there's a certain one that is used for a cleanser and people drink it. It is from the sulfur deposit itself, but it is not hot, its actually normal temperature water up in the sulfur spring in Soufriere. It's like a little stream. I really don't know about spring water. I don't see any use for that. Rainwater is used, it's collected, and people use it to water their plants, like farmers do it on the plantation, because you never know when it could be a drought and they have to have a sufficient amount of water for their crops. People also use it as drinking water, preferably when its hurricane season because at that time water lines can get damaged and stuff, and so you want to have a backup. I actually went through that experience.

Water is a significant element within Dominican daily life. People on the island rely on the resource for subsistence, as well as for cultural practices. Water is a fundamental aspect on the homogenous knowledge domain of life and nature on the island. Each Dominican respondent described an abundance of water resources present on the island. However, residential variation seems to have an effect on the types of water that are utilized and what they are used for. Interview data suggests that citizens of the island residing in rural communities perceive and rely on a greater amount of water types than those in urban communities.

### Perspectives on Water Sharing in Dominica

Dominican respondents in this study (Pickering 2014) expressed a moral responsibility to share water with other countries dealing with extreme poverty, drought, and/or natural disasters. However, in conjunction with donating water as aid to







Water Type	Table 1 Water Types and Uses																			
	Water Use																			
	Washing Clothes	Washing Car	Transportation	Tourism	Swimming	Religion	Recreation	Public Water	Medicine	Hydro-electricity	Geothermal - electricity	Fishing	Domestic Use	Drinking	Diving	Cooking	Construction	Bottled Water	Bathing	Agriculture/ Livestock
1. Caribbean Sea			X		X	X	X	X	X		X				X				X	
2. Atlantic Ocean			X		X	X	X	X	X		X				X				X	
3. Fresh Rivers	X			X		X	X			X		X	X	X		X		X	X	
4. Springs								X					X	X				X		
5. Aquifers								X						X				X		
6. Lakes				X	X		X			X								X	X	
7. Freshwater Lake (Specific lake in Domi- nica)					X		X			X								X		
8. Rain	X	X						X					X	X		X	X		X	X
9. Steam								X												
10. Swamps								X												
11. Waterfalls				X	X		X	X		X										
12. Sous (Creole for water that drips from rock walls)								X												
12. Mineral Water								X												
13. Glogayak (Creole for cold mineral water)									X											
14. Sulfuric Rivers		X					X	X		X		X	X	X						X
15. Sulfur Ponds		X					X	X		X		X	X	X						X
16. Sulfur Lakes		X					X	X		X		X	X	X						X
17. Boiling Lake (Specific lake in Dominica)													X	X					X	
18. Mayan Water (Hot water)		X											X	X						
19. Public Water (Tap or outdoor stand-pipe)					X		X	X					X							X





**Figure 3: Atlantic Ocean and Dominica's Northeast Coast**

vulnerable communities in the case of drought or natural disasters, Dominican respondents supported the sale of water by the government to foreign businesses as a means of bringing economic development to the island. While the majority of study (Pickering 2014) participants indicated approval of water exportation, respondents differed in their perceptions of the ethical and economic motivations of bulk exportation. Data indicated a correlation between age and Dominican opinions on exportation; respondents from either urban communities or younger generations were more likely to emphasize the economic benefits of foreign water sales than older or rural populations. Although each respondent valued the potential for generosity, many people also suggested potential for economic reciprocity. A cultural disconnect exists between the altruistic values and fiscal demands. Values do not change, however, when two values are in conflict they must be prioritized (Stoffle, Jensen, and Rasch 1987). Therefore, values are homogenous, but the perspectives and attitudes Dominican respondents had regarding exportation motivations can differ based on their priorities.

That being said, in the study (Pickering 2014), a majority of respondents also acknowledged the possibility of bulk water sales bringing income to the island. Most interviewees were in support of water exportation endeavors, but there was a division between the ethical and economic perspectives among respondents. In this study (Pickering 2014), interviewees from urban communities more frequently suggested Dominican water should be sold in bulk to foreign countries for the purpose of

positive economic development on the island. However, only a small number of study participants (Pickering 2014) indicated awareness of current bulk water sale efforts, and of those respondents that were aware, an even smaller percentage demonstrated a strong understanding of the many ways in which freshwater was being exported from the island.

### Experiences of Environmental Change

Each Dominican respondent described an abundance in quantity and types of water on the island, as was previously discussed. Although there are high levels of water on Dominica, respondents provided insight into current ecological shifts. Dominican respondents in this study (Pickering 2014) associated recent environmental shifts, such as unpredictable timing and amount of rainfall, with climate change.

The final focus of this research was to investigate the Dominican frame of reference for climate change. Initially, interviewees were commonly unsure or stated that they had not had any personal experiences of climatic shifts, but with further questions and conversation, study participants (Pickering 2014) described detailed timelines of changes in seasonal weather. Most of the respondents stated that in recent years the levels of annual rainfall have not only decreased but also become very unpredictable. Historically, there have been distinct rainy and dry seasons, however, in the last couple of years the seasons have shifted and produced unpredictable weather patterns. Many interviewees also described the increased severity of hurricanes, and how this has impacted Dominican infrastructure, roads, and water pipes. In this study (Pickering 2014), interviewees from rural communities responded with personal experiences of changes in weather or the environment in higher numbers than the interviewees from urban communities. Research participants commonly stated that regardless of a potential drought in the future, Dominican water should continue to be exported because the drought could never be substantial enough to affect local water availability. Among the total number of study participants (Pickering 2014), only a small number of Dominicans expressed apprehension towards bulk water exportation in concurrence with future climatic shifts.

Some indicators for environmental change are more difficult to anticipate. Changes in amounts of annual rainfall or groundwater have direct impacts on the entire ecosystem, which effects biodiversity. In response to a discussion on personal experiences with environmental change (Pickering 2014), one Dominican participant stated that in recent years he had witnessed a sig-







Figure 4: Mountain Chicken (Photo Credit Wildscreen Arkive)

nificant decline in Mountain Chickens (Figure 4). Apparently, this large frog has a similar taste to poultry when cooked, and was commonly named the Mountain Chicken for that reason (Khan 2011). The Mountain Chicken, *Leptodactylus fallax* (Crother 1999), is an environmental indicator of climate change; within the last decade the population of this frog has decreased by 80%, qualifying it as being critically endangered (Wildscreen Arkive). One explanation for the dramatic population decrease is fluctuations to the ecosystem. A secondary explanation suggests the significant population decrease was the result of the chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*) that recently reached Dominica (Alemu et al. 2008). Climate change may increase the vulnerability of the frog to the chytrid fungus in high montane environments (Alemu et al. 2008), and therefore, these two explanations may be independent from one another.

This interviewee (Pickering 2014) described how the mountain chicken used to exist abundantly across the island, and was a traditional Dominican dish that was prepared for national

holidays and other special occasions. However, in more recent experiences, the respondent affirmed that the frog population on Dominica has dropped so significantly that you can no longer hear their distinct chirping, and Mountain Chicken is never on the menu. According to this respondent, this disappearance of the Mountain Chicken on Dominica suggests that the balance of the environment is shifting as a result of climate change. As the environment continues to change, culturally central resources, like the Mountain Chicken and perhaps even water itself, become increasingly difficult for Dominican people to access.

## Discussion

Water is more than just a natural resource in Dominica; it is a defining feature of the Dominican national identity. Nicknames local people use to refer to the island are derived from the abundant water and natural environment. Dominican respondents demonstrated significant water knowledge, and intricately incorporate a wide variety of water types into daily life. The ways in which water is perceived and used by Dominican people is unique. Dominican people have a deep and homogeneous understanding of the medicinal, nutritional, and domestic properties of the resource, as well as the influence water has on the health and balance of the environment.

Throughout Dominican history, generosity and selflessness have been established as cultural values islandwide. Bulk water sharing and exportation have been interpreted and accepted by Dominican people through these morals. Dominican respondents were in support of exporting water due the abundance of the resource on the island, and the urgent need other people experience in times of drought or natural disaster. An epistemological conflict (Figure 5) has developed with the endeavor to export water. Generosity and resource sharing are traditional cultural concepts in Dominica, but there are few economic opportunities on the island, so water sales present a possibility for economic development. Climate change threatens both the Dominican cultural connections to water and potential water sales.

While Dominican people uphold the cultural value that resources should be shared, the island is also being confronted by economic struggles and climatic changes. Since before colonial times, Dominica has had difficulty gaining economic independence. Water sales present an opportunity for potential economic development, but contrast the traditional communal understanding of the resource. Similarly, bulk water exportation presents an issue in terms of climate change. A high level of water exportation is not sustainable, and will impact the ecology on the island. Environmental indicators of climate change have been documented. Rain patterns are becoming less predictable and vulnerable species, like the Mountain Chicken, are disappearing.

Traditional knowledge of water and the cultural beliefs of how water should be managed have been practiced on Dominica for hundreds of years. The information and ideals are shared islandwide. However, recent developments of urbanization, globalization, economic endeavors, and climate change have the potential to impact water knowledge and water manage-

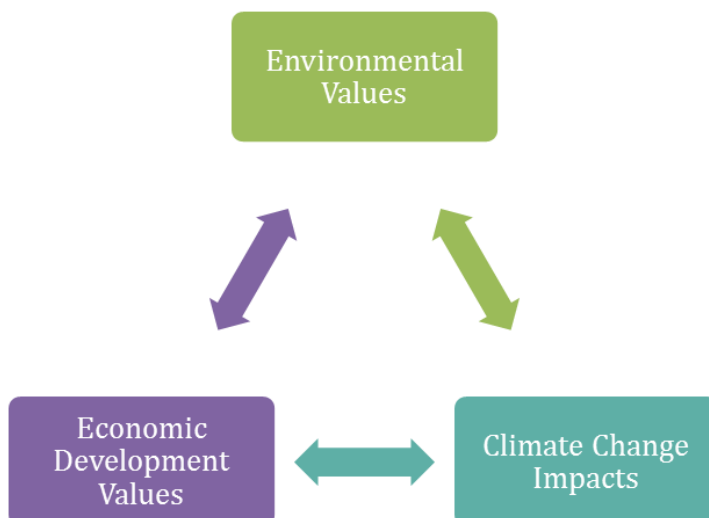


Figure 5: Relationships Between Environmental Values, Economy, and Climate





ment, as well as the continuing abundance of water on the island. Currently, Dominican people have a positive outlook on the quality and quantity of water available on the island. Water is life on Dominica, and the distinct way in which the resource has been socially constructed has influenced the perspectives and interpretations Dominican people have regarding bulk water exportation.

## References

Alemu I, Jahson B., Michelle N. E. Cazabon, Lena Dempewolf, Adrian Hailey, Richard M. Lehtinen, Ryan P. Mannette, Kerrie T. Naranjit, and Alicia C. J. Roach. 2008. Presence of the chytrid fungus *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* in populations of the critically endangered frog *Mannophryne olmonae* in Tobago, West Indies. *EcoHealth* 5, (1): 34-39

Crother, Brian L.  
1999. Caribbean amphibians and reptiles. San Diego: Academic Press.

## DOWASCO

2011 "New Water and Sewage Tariffs". [http://www.dowasco.dm/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=140:new-water-and-sewerage-tariffs&catid=47:press-release](http://www.dowasco.dm/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=140:new-water-and-sewerage-tariffs&catid=47:press-release)

## Hains, John

"Photos by John Hains" Panoramio Google Maps. <http://www.panoramio.com/user/4121863/tags/Dominica>

## Honychurch, Lennox.

1995. The Dominica story: a history of the island. London: Macmillan.

## Khan, Zaina.

2011 "Leptodactylus fallax: Mountain Chicken." In Encyclopedia of Life. The Regents of the University of California. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://eol.org/pages/1048167/overview>.

## Mantz, Jeffrey William.

2007. How A Huckster Becomes A Custodian of Market Morality: Traditions of Flexibility in Exchange in Dominica. *Identities* 14, (1): 19-38.

## Pickering, Evelyn.

2014. The social construction of water in Dominica and how it has influenced use and exportation. Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona

## Stoffle, Richard W., Florence V. Jensen, and Danny L. Rasch.

1987. Cultural basis of sport anglers' response to reduced lake trout catch limits. *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society* 116, (3): 503-509

## Vacations to Go.

Accessed October 21, 2014. Map. [http://www.vacationstogo.com/images/ports/maps/592\\_w.gif](http://www.vacationstogo.com/images/ports/maps/592_w.gif)

## Wildscreen Arkive.

"Mountain chicken (*Leptodactylus fallax*).\" Accessed December 4, 2014. <http://www.arkive.org/mountain-chicken/leptodactylus-fallax/>.



# The Applied Anthropologist

Vol. 35  
No. 2  
2015

REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD: VOICE IN CROSS-CULTURAL  
AND TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

ARREN MENDEZONA ALLEGRETTI

## ABSTRACT

Sustaining multicultural collaboration, commitment and accountability in transdisciplinary fieldwork requires engaging and creating space for diverse voices. Despite the urgent need for examining transdisciplinary research processes, narratives concerning the role and influence of voice in transdisciplinary research (TDR) are often buried beneath the well-organized and distilled scientific products typically showcased to academic audiences. In this manuscript, I explore the role of voice in transdisciplinary field research. First, I begin by defining and exploring the role of voice in this context. Second, I offer a reflexive account of my experience working on a cross-cultural transdisciplinary research project. Third, I provide an ethnographic analysis to offer guidance for others practicing transdisciplinary field research, particularly for those engaged in cross-cultural, team-based projects. My reflexive account of transdisciplinary fieldwork reveals the complex network of actors and how those voices and opinions are shaped by identity, language, financial structures and hierarchy within TDR projects. The goal of this manuscript is to unravel a few indispensable insights for enhancing team dynamics, fieldwork, and consequently the caliber of scientific research conducted in transdisciplinary teams.

## Introduction

It was July 15, 2012, I had just finished describing the soils in our plot and I joined my team members resting on the windswept mountain steppe in Arkhangai, Mongolia. My cell phone rang and I could see that it was the co-principal investigator (Co-PI) of our project calling me again to check-in. With my field team leader's eyes on me as the only non-Mongolian team member, I left the group so that I could have more privacy. I was tired and frustrated about constantly not knowing project logistics and feeling like my voice did not matter. When I got the call from the Co-PI, I calmly told her to call the team leader directly. I did not want my phone call with the Co-PI to create tensions between the team leader and me, particularly since I could communicate project details to the Co-PI in English. I was aware of the implications of my position as the PhD student in my team representing the US University that was directing and funding this research project. I was also conscious of the importance of hierarchy in conducting fieldwork with our Mongolian partners, and the Co-PI's direct phone calls to her PhD student instead of the team leader contributed to these communication tensions in fieldwork. The Co-PI and I understood that there were many cultural, organizational and interpersonal aspects that influenced our fieldwork and team dynamics.

After in-depth analysis and reflection of my fieldwork experience, four major themes highlighted the importance of voice in fieldwork: researcher identity, language, hierarchy, and financial structures. These themes continued to re-appear and soon I had tremendous evidence that these were driving forces that influenced how individuals in our team voiced their opinions and reactions while in the field, conducting transdisciplinary team research. Engaging diverse voices of team mem-

bers in field research is complex and critical for sustaining cross-cultural collaboration, commitment, and accountability in transdisciplinary research (Gray 2008; Mountz et al. 2003; Thompson 2009). In this manuscript, I explore what influences team member voice while conducting fieldwork in a transdisciplinary research project. The aim of this manuscript is three-fold. First, I begin by defining and exploring the role of voice in transdisciplinary and cross-cultural field research. Second, I offer a reflexive account of my experience working on a cross-cultural transdisciplinary research project. I focus on my role and identity within the fieldwork process and interactions within the larger research team. Third, I analyze my experiences to offer insights for others practicing transdisciplinary fieldwork, particularly for those engaged in cross-cultural, team-based projects. Similar to the work of Mountz et al. (2003), who focus on the role of power and team dynamics in field research, I immerse myself in my own field research struggles in an attempt to analyze and further understand the nuances of conducting socio-ecological field work and transdisciplinary science within a multi-cultural research team.

## Voice and Transdisciplinary Research

Peoples and Depoe (2014) link the concept of voice with the expression of an opinion or the articulations of worldviews. Voice entails the process of sharing details about oneself, including one's identity and ways of how one comes to know the world (Couldry 2010). In transdisciplinary research (TDR) teams, the voices of researchers and stakeholders are shared with the collective goals of integrating knowledge, language and methods for developing novel conceptual frameworks (Roux, Stirzaker, Breen, Lefroy, & Cresswell, 2010). TDR involves more than just addressing disciplinary differences



among researchers, but rather engaging the knowledge, voices, and cultures of multiple stakeholders at *all* stages of the research (Stokols, Hall, Taylor, & Moser, 2008).

I apply Mezias, Chen, and Murphy's (1999) definition of culture as the processes defining the identity of actors or stakeholders and providing the "behavioral scripts" for managing relations between actors (p.326). I also acknowledge Eric Wolf's (2010) view of cultures as perpetually changing and unbounding traits expressed through social relations of power, politics, and communication. These definitions highlight how culture is played out in a dynamic mix of power relations in TDR, where researchers' cultural world views are formed by his or her position with the structure and hierarchy of a project (Wolf 2010; Wolf 2014). Similar to Nadasdy (1999) and Latour's (1998) assertions on research and science, I emphasize the communication processes in TDR fieldwork that give rise to the production and utility of science.

Many factors influence how voices are shared, engaged and represented in TDR. In this manuscript, I focus on identity, language, financial structure and hierarchy as the major factors that influenced voice in my fieldwork experience. Researcher *identity* includes how team members perceive themselves within their discipline and roles within TDR projects (Muhammad et al. 2014; Wall and Shankar 2008). Related to identity, researchers use a certain *language* to communicate their worldview, research questions, methods and analyses. The process of co-developing common concepts and research languages may be influenced by the *financial structures* (e.g., funding sources) and *hierarchy* of methods, disciplines and roles in TDR projects (Lingard et al., 2007). In this manuscript, I share my fieldwork experiences as a member of the Socio-ecological Complexity (SEC) research team and analyze the factors that influenced voice in my fieldwork.

## Socio-ecological Complexity (SEC) Project

The SEC project is a pseudonym for an actual TDR project investigating socio-ecological rangeland resilience to climate change in Mongolia. The core SEC research team includes the principal investigator (PI) and Co-PIs that represent seven academic departments at a large university in the Western US. These departments reflect diverse approaches and disciplines crucial for acquiring holistic views of complex environmental issues.

SEC's main funder is the National Science Foundation (NSF), which awarded a team of US researchers a \$1.5 million grant for a five-year project. The team of US researchers partnered with Mongolian researchers, herders and government ministries to examine Mongolian rangeland systems. Research hypotheses and proposal ideas were initially developed with Mongolian partners and herders in workshops prior to competing for the NSF grant. Funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Collaborative Research Support Program and the World Bank helped to develop and deliver ecological training workshops with the Mongolian partners.

The SEC research team also consisted of Mongolian, Philip-

pine, and American postdoctoral and PhD students in rangeland ecology, hydrology and human dimensions of natural resources. Together with the PI, Co-PIs, and the Mongolian project coordinator, the graduate students worked with our Mongolian partners to collect socio-ecological data. To communicate and organize fieldwork, the SEC team conducted monthly face-to-face meetings and calls in the US, annual meetings in Mongolia, and socio-ecological data collection training workshops for three field seasons in Mongolia (2011-2013). Mongolian researchers and secondary school teachers participated in these training workshops and data collection. Senior Mongolian scholars led teams of Mongolian students and junior researchers in collecting socio-ecological data. The SEC team in the US depended on Mongolian collaborators' commitment for leading fieldwork, translating training and policy workshops, and coordinating with seven Mongolian research partners who provided the staff to collect socio-ecological data.

The SEC project involves multicultural and TDR endeavors that require the translation of languages and cultures among researchers representing US, Mongolian, and disciplinary institutions. This rich mix of cultures define the identity of the SEC members and each researcher within the team identifies with a disciplinary language serving as a "behavioral script" to communicate and navigate in TDR. SEC's complexity illustrates that knowledge integration does not function in isolation; rather it is embedded in the management of relationships and norms of diverse actors.

## Methods

### Roles and Positionality

I was part of the SEC team as a graduate student researcher for over four years. I was initially tasked to study TDR team communication processes for my dissertation.

My training in the social and ecological sciences attracted me to participate and examine the different data collection and analyses components of SEC. I served as a participant observer in the socio-ecological data collection and assisted in fieldwork where we interviewed herder groups and collected vegetation, soils and geomorphological data in the Mongolian rangelands. My assertions and emphases on the role of voice in TDR are based on my everyday, lived experiences working within the SEC team. Thus, I use a constructivist approach to examine SEC as a team of researchers voicing their different approaches and worldviews to integrating disciplinary data and knowledge systems.

### SEC Case Study

This manuscript is part of a larger ethnographic case study, in which I am using qualitative methods to explore, explain and better understand knowledge integration and communication processes within TDR teams. As a participant observer and researcher in SEC since 2011, I developed relationships with SEC team members. I believe that these relationships cultivated camaraderie and trust crucial for gaining emic perspectives of TDR team communication. I provided a "Consent to Participate" letter

to team members in 2011, where I clarified my research intentions, potential products (e.g., publications), and confidentiality limitations, including the possibility of identities being indirectly recognized due to the size and closeness of the team. The team was aware of my role as a participant observer and my research goals of examining communication and knowledge integration within TDR teams. To avoid these social desirability biases, I triangulated respondents' comments at team events with follow-up personal interviews and participant observation notes.

## Data Collection and Analyses

In the four years of participant observation, I gathered data while organizing and attending monthly and annual meetings, conducting fieldwork in Mongolia, attending conferences, informal social gatherings and annual team retreats. These inter-related activities were key events within SEC and influenced my views in conducting fieldwork in Mongolia. In this manuscript, I specifically highlight my 2011 and 2012 fieldwork experiences, which included co-organizing training workshops and collecting social and ecological data in Mongolia. During my fieldwork, I interviewed US and Mongolian partners about their experiences ( $n = 27$ ), transcribed these interviews and stored these in a separate database for maintaining confidentiality and my university's Institutional Review Board standards.

A critical component of my data involved my field notes and daily journal entries detailing my reflections and fieldwork experiences with my US and Mongolian colleagues. I have open-coded and re-coded my field notes, journal entries, and interviews. Since joining the SEC team in 2011, it was my reflexive iteration of my own fieldwork experiences that led me to realize that voice matters in fieldwork and the production of TDR. Reflexive iteration involves revisiting and connecting my field notes and experience with emerging insights, leading to more polished and refined stories, themes, and concepts (Srivastava and Hopwood 2009).

## **Analysis**

I have selected several examples from my fieldwork that illustrate identity, language, financial structure and hierarchy aspects of team member voice in a TDR context. While these aspects overlap, I have made choices as the narrator of this manuscript to select examples that best illustrate the nuances of voice and its influence in TDR fieldwork.

## **Researcher Identity**

The identity of researchers within TDR teams may be expressed through their voices and roles as they collectively navigate the complex world of developing relationships in TDR contexts (Lingard et al. 2007; Manathunga 2009). Muhammad et al. (2014) assert that the identity and status of team members become more salient through dimensions of power and privilege within project partnerships. Within this research team, we had strong partnerships with Mongolian communities of researchers who were crucial for gathering field data. Our Mongolian part-

ners were appropriately positioned to lead field teams based on their relationships to the communities they work with.

Multiple positionalities and identities influence research validity, processes, and outcomes on collaborative insider-outsider teams (Muhammad et al. 2014). Insider teams involve actors directly driving the research design and questions while outsider teams include actors who were brought in later, yet play important roles such as collecting research data and providing perspectives necessary for integrating knowledge. The existence of insider-outsider teams may occur in TDR projects where team members are in multiple positions to communicate with different communities of practice and research. In SEC, communities of researchers consisted of PIs and Co-PIs from US universities and researchers from Mongolian institutes and universities. From a research and funding perspective, it is relatively easy to envision the PI and Co-PIs from US universities as the insider or core team, especially since they secured funding from US agencies and led the development of the research instruments, methods, analyses, and database housed and controlled within a US university. Our main Mongolian partner institution stored all of the hard copies of our social data.

Power may be concentrated with the insider team of researchers controlling funding and research data. As a former PhD candidate within the SEC project in the US, I was considered part of the core insider team with one of the Co-PIs serving as my adviser and guiding me through the research questions stated in our NSF proposal. However, my field experience in Mongolia resulted in the reverse situation where I was considered part of the outsider team of US researchers. There were three field teams assigned to collect ecological data across Mongolia. I belonged to the third field team, where my researcher identity was certainly challenged as the only US representative from the SEC project. I was assigned to be in the position of not only collecting soils data, but ensuring that research protocols were being followed. My Mongolian field team lead was a collaborator and not a Co-PI of the SEC project. She was a Mongolian researcher who had substantial experience with botanical surveys in the Gobi Desert, but was relatively new to the SEC protocol of collecting and integrating soils, vegetation, biomass, and geomorphological data for assessing rangeland resilience. The complex nature of positionality, identity, power and representation of team members created a scenario ripe for conflict and communication challenges. For example, I asked a team member and translator about the team budget for camping and my concerns about not being able to stay in a hotel when the weather was bad. We were told by the Co-PI that we would mostly be camping and that budget was very limited for hotels. The team leader overheard my simple inquiry and reacted "You want to see budget, here I show budget and I have lots of paperwork to show you!" Surprised by her response, I simply stated that I trusted her and that I truly did not know what was going on. Reflecting and discussing field experiences with SEC's PI, I understood that my lenses of planning fieldwork differed greatly

from the Mongolian field leader's norms of flexibility to scheduling fieldwork. Fieldwork plans would change daily due to the complex contingencies and negotiations needed for sampling and traveling to field sites. My position and identity representing the insider SEC team may have created tension with the field team leader. This tension was further fueled by the lead Co-PI calling my cell phone directly instead of calling the team leader first. As mentioned earlier, I had to tell the Co-PI to stop calling me and the Co-PI understood right away about this power dynamic and the importance of showing trust that our Mongolian team lead had the field work under control.

Identity in multicultural and TDR projects like the SEC may consist of personal, epistemological and institutional layers embedded in researchers' voices, identities, and roles (Borg et al. 2012). Personal and epistemological layers of identity involve our current and prior experiences with not just TDR projects, but also with relationships we have had with individuals that influence how we see and come to know to the world. Examining the role of identity in TDR initially involves a reflexive understanding of one's own identity and its influence on the outcomes within the project.

The role of knowledge brokers within SEC is pivotal to understanding identity and the expression of voice in TDR research (Aneas and Sandín 2009; Mountz et al. 2003). Lingard et al. (2007) assert that multiple identities of each researcher exist within interdisciplinary and TDR teams. The multiplicity of identities in TDR teams creates conditions for conflict and creativity, especially when team members serve as knowledge brokers who translate and transfer knowledge across different scholarly communities. Potentially all researchers in the team can be knowledge brokers based on their discipline and communities that they work with (Lingard et al. 2007). However, researchers can also feel estrangement or seem to be a "stranger" when not only defending the legitimacy of one's discipline but their voice and associated experiences (Lingard et al., 2007). Acknowledging the need for researcher identities to be flexible is crucial for researchers to feel that their voices are genuinely heard, and considered legitimate. There is also the possibility of voices being initially heard, but ultimately not considered in the decision-making process, resulting in consultation fatigue (Reed 2008). The inclusion of voices at different research stages is influenced by power relations underlying research languages that legitimize knowledge, concepts and methods in TDR (Nadasdy 1999).

## Language

The role of language is essential for examining cross-cultural and TDR field experiences, particularly with how language is communicated among insider-outsider research teams (Aneas and Sandín 2009; Mountz et al. 2003). Addressing language boundaries in TDR field settings goes beyond translating interlingual differences (e.g., English vs. Mongolian) and involves recognizing the complexity and impact of different research languages that all team members must communicate, transfer,

and transform (Carlile 2004; Kitson and Phil 2009). TDR languages not only entail different disciplines, but also include exposure and acknowledgement of different ways of doing and envisioning research conduct in multicultural teams. For example, many of our Mongolian junior researchers mentioned that they were accustomed to having their professors develop their research questions, analyses, and presentation of data in one particular manner. The typical research conduct is to obey and follow what is told of their superiors. In contrast, SEC norms required all Mongolian researchers, including students and junior scholars to develop a short research proposal in Mongolian that stated their research questions, methods, and proposed analyses prior to obtaining data stored in the US university database. As our Mongolian coordinator mentioned, "we are not used to this kind of democracy," referring to our Mongolian junior researchers' exposure to developing their own research questions and analyses. To build capacity and exposure to new ways of research, our PI travelled to Mongolia on several occasions to train our Mongolian junior scholars and students in proposal writing and socio-ecological analyses. We also allotted significant time in our second annual meeting to proposal writing workshops. Our Mongolian post-doctorates, coordinators, and PhD students were pivotal to communicating with our Mongolian colleagues and appropriately translating research proposals.

Translating TDR research languages involves the complex task of accepting how researchers come to know and understand a process while conducting TDR fieldwork. Attributing interlingual differences as the sole cause for misunderstandings in TDR is myopic. Based on my experiences and interviews with team members, I have come to understand that it is the research language(s) intertwined with our epistemologies and interlingual language boundaries that influence and enrich our team dynamics of conducting fieldwork, voicing our opinions and translating our knowledge systems in TDR field settings. For example, I recall a conversation that I had with the team leader, where I asked about the Ibex population in one of our field sites. She mentioned that the population was 100. I followed-up with inquiring whether 100 Ibexes was the projected population and if it differed from the number of recent observed sightings. The team leader appeared to be frustrated and mentioned, "I told you 100 Ibexes, you don't listen!" While neither of us were wildlife biologists, I assumed that our team leader would understand my inquiry and the difference between projected population and the number of observed sightings. The complexity of translating different semantic and research languages often results in the misinterpretation of voices and consequently the intentions and knowledge associated with those voices.

Carlile (2004) warns us that power is still expressed even when actors have equal ability to share and assess each other's language and associated voices. However, when capacities and the privilege to use the common language (e.g., English spoken by US scientists) are not equal or represent one of many actors' knowledge (e.g., research language and protocols), mismatches in translation and misrepresentation of voices occur (Carlile,





2004). In this team, we were very aware of the power differences within the larger project especially with the US researchers serving as principal investigators while Mongolian researchers served as collaborators for collecting socio-ecological field data. Instruments and methods for collecting field data were mainly created by US researchers and communicated through training workshops conducted in Mongolia. Mongolian researchers provided feedback in refining the instruments to match the context of our field sites and herder groups we interviewed. Graduate students served as knowledge brokers and were indispensable at transferring and translating research languages during these training workshops. These knowledge brokers helped bridge pragmatic knowledge boundaries that delineate diverse voices and languages in TDR field research. This situation depicts power differences between US and Mongolian researchers and the importance of matching translation processes to specific interlingual differences and pragmatic knowledge boundaries. The emphases on sharing knowledge across boundaries extends beyond the concern from the structure and meaning of language to pragmatic concerns of what processes and methods are required for effective communication across disciplines and cultures (Carlile, 2004).

## Hierarchy and Financial Structure

Financial structures and hierarchy of research methods and priorities may create incentives or disincentives for scientists to collaborate and reinforce their reticence or insistence on voicing preferred research directions and decisions in TDR (Lingard et al. 2007; Manathunga 2009). Lingard et al. (2007) narrate their team experiences of financial structural constraints originating in the value system of their research funder and the hierarchy embodied in their field methods and analyses. In SEC, financial structure and hierarchy or the differential prioritization of project components influenced fieldwork and team members' perceptions of project priorities. For example, my fieldwork interviews revealed different perceptions of how the SEC project had prioritized the separate ecological and social fieldwork. Both fieldwork efforts were led by different field leaders and occurred in different field seasons requiring a unique set of resources. Consequently, the financial resources allotted for each type of fieldwork differed. The social fieldwork included interviews, surveys, and focus groups with herder groups and county governments requiring field members to stay in county centers and local hotels. In contrast, the ecological fieldwork involved sampling the rangelands' surrounding herders' winter camps (*uvuljuus*), requiring ecological teams to camp near *uvuljuus* instead of staying in hotels. As a result, more financial resources were allocated for the ecological team's gear (e.g., U.S. branded three-season tents, soils equipment, cameras) than for the social team. The difference in financial resources allocation appeared to create different sentiments among ecological teams. Many of the ecological team members felt that it was unfair that they had to camp and stay in tents perceived as cheap and not sturdy enough to withstand the Mongolian winds. These sentiments perhaps revealed the resistance of our Mon-

golian partners to reproduce the power relations and hierarchy associated with individuals' sleeping in tents instead of hotels. While the reasons underlying these sentiments may be interpreted in various ways, the financial structure and SEC's decision-making processes for resources and budgets certainly influenced some of our colleagues' sentiments in voicing their opinions within SEC.

## Concluding Thoughts

Conceptualizing the role of voice in TDR fieldwork involves examining the impact of researcher identity, language, financial structure and hierarchy on research team processes and outcomes. Identity influences how team members perceive their discipline, epistemologies and their roles within TDR projects. Cultivating the space and flexibility for researchers' identities to shift in TDR could involve face-to-face group reflections where team members may be candid and vocalize their shifting identities and roles as they collectively navigate TDR (Roux et al., 2010; Allegretti et al. forthcoming). Language in multicultural TDR fieldwork does not only involve the translation of interlingual differences, but the translation of pragmatic knowledge boundaries where team members voice their concerns and develop common meanings about the project. A team's sensitivity to their research language allows members to genuinely listen and be cognizant with how they accept, translate, and prioritize a projects' research language. The prioritization of research languages and methods make up the hierarchy and financial structures of TDR projects. Funding institutions typically value and prioritize specific frameworks and methods, which creates incentives for researchers to allocate to certain tools and disciplines in TDR.

The process and outcomes of TDR are influenced by the complex network of actors who vocalize their opinions. Solely focusing on TDR products (e.g., publications), and disregarding the influences of voice in teams may result in the oversimplification of communication conflicts that unravel indispensable lessons for enhancing team dynamics, fieldwork and consequently scientific data collected and analyzed (Thompson 2009; Latour 1998). My fieldwork experience and my subsequent in-depth analysis of numerous conversations and observations revealed a need, if not an urgency, for me to more closely examine the role of voice in TDR and its influence on the scientific process. While my ethnographic experience exposed a variety of nuances in voice, this paper would have been very different if all of the Mongolian and US collaborators contributed to collaboratively writing the SEC team's fieldwork stories. It is important to recognize the role of storytelling and how this process gives voice to team members' varied experiences. Whether we reflect upon all of the possible different stories, or focus on a few, any reflection and listening to the voices in a TDR team allows deeper understanding of the team members' diverse identities, language, hierarchy and structures that ultimately shape the outcomes of TDR and the science collectively produced.





## References

- Aneas, María Assumpta, and María Paz Sandin.  
2009. "Intercultural and Cross-Cultural Communication Research: Some Reflections about Culture and Qualitative Methods." In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. Vol. 10. <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/viewArticle/1251>.
- Allegretti, Arren Mendoza, Jessica Thompson, and Melinda Laituri.  
2012. Engagement and Accountability in Transdisciplinary Space: Principles for Facilitating a Reflective Adaptive Process in Complex Teams. *Knowledge Management for Development Journal* 11(2).
- Borg, Marit, Bengt Karlsson, Hesook Suzie Kim, and Brendan McCormack.  
2012. "Opening up for Many Voices in Knowledge Construction." In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. Vol. 13. <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1793>.
- Carlile, Paul R.  
2004. "Transferring, Translating, and Transforming: An Integrative Framework for Managing Knowledge Across Boundaries." *Organization Science* 15 (5): 555–68. doi:10.1287/orsc.1040.0094.
- Couldry, Nick.  
2010. *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism*. Sage Publications.
- Gray, Barbara.  
2008. "Enhancing Transdisciplinary Research Through Collaborative Leadership." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 35 (2): S124–32. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2008.03.037.
- Kitson, Alison, and D Phil.  
2009. "Knowledge Translation and Guidelines: A Transfer, Translation or Transformation Process?" *International Journal of Evidence-Based Healthcare* 7 (2): 124–39. doi:10.1111/j.1744-1609.2009.00130.x.
- Latour, Bruno.  
1998. "From the World of Science to the World of Research?" *Science* 280 (5361): 208–9.
- Lingard, Lorelei, Catherine F. Schryer, Marlee M. Spafford, and Sandra L. Campbell.  
2007. "Negotiating the Politics of Identity in an Interdisciplinary Research Team." *Qualitative Research* 7 (4): 501–19.
- Manathunga, Catherine.  
2009. "Post-Colonial Perspectives on Interdisciplinary Researcher Identities." *Academic Research and Researchers*, Eds. Angela Brew and Lisa Lucas, 131–45.
- Mezias, Stephen J., Y. R. Chen, and Patrice Murphy.  
1999. "Toto, I Don't Think We're in Kansas Anymore." *Some Footnotes to Cross-Cultural Research. Journal of Management Inquiry* 8: 323–33.
- Mountz, Alison, Ines M. Miyares, Richard Wright, and Adrian J. Bailey.  
2003. "Methodologically Becoming: Power, Knowledge and Team Research." *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 10 (1): 29–46.
- Muhammad, Michael, Nina Wallerstein, Andrew L. Sussman, Magdalena Avila, Lorenda Belone, and Bonnie Duran.  
2014. "Reflections on Researcher Identity and Power: The Impact of Positionality on Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) Processes and Outcomes." *Critical Sociology*, 0896920513516025.
- Nadasdy, Paul.  
1999. "The Politics of TEK: Power and the 'Integration' of Knowledge." *Arctic Anthropology*, 1–18.
- Reed, Mark S. 2008. "Stakeholder Participation for Environmental Management: A Literature Review." *Biological Conservation* 141 (10): 2417–31. doi:10.1016/j.biocon.2008.07.014.
- Roux, D. J., R. J. Stirzaker, C. M. Breen, E. C. Lefroy, and H. P. Cresswell.  
2010. "Framework for Participative Reflection on the Accomplishment of Transdisciplinary Research Programs." *Environmental Science & Policy* 13 (8): 733–41.
- Srivastava, Prachi, and Nick Hopwood.  
2009. "A Practical Iterative Framework for Qualitative Data Analysis." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8 (1).
- Stokols, Daniel, Kara L. Hall, Brandie K. Taylor, and Richard P. Moser.  
2008. "The Science of Team Science: Overview of the Field and Introduction to the Supplement." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 35 (2): S77–89.
- Thompson, Jessica Leigh.  
2009. "Building Collective Communication Competence in Interdisciplinary Research Teams." *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 37 (3): 278–97. doi:10.1080/00909880903025911.
- Wall, Sarah, and Irene Shankar.  
2008. "Adventures in Transdisciplinary Learning." *Studies in Higher Education* 33 (5): 551–65.
- Wolf, Eric R. 1923-1999.  
2010. *Europe and the People without History*. Ebook Library (EBL). Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press. [http://www.CSU.eblib.com/EBLWeb/patron/?target=patron&extendedid=P\\_865264\\_0](http://www.CSU.eblib.com/EBLWeb/patron/?target=patron&extendedid=P_865264_0).
- Wolf, Michaela.  
2014. "Culture as Translation—and beyond Ethnographic Models of Representation in Translation Studies." *Crosscultural Transgressions. Research Models in Translation Studies II, Historical and Ideological Issues*, 180–92.



## ABSTRACT

Conservation is a significant concern for the tropical forested regions of the world, and throughout much of the tropics development efforts are often coupled with conservation. This article examines conservation management and economic development in northwest Amazonia while focusing on the growth of the **chambira** palm weaving industry. Central to this article is the issue of equity and the impact that a resource based development initiative has on participating Amazonian communities. Based on fieldwork conducted in 2012, 2013, and 2014 this article examines the case of development and resource conservation in the Área de Conservación Regional Comunal Tamshiyacu – Tahuayo. I use the UK's Department for International Development Sustainable Livelihood Framework in order to assess the benefits of small-scale development in the form of chambira weaving. This research suggests that conservation and selective resource use, in the case of the Tahuayo, provide viable economic alternatives to broad-based natural resource extraction while at the same time validating local knowledge, empowering communities and individuals, and strengthening community relations. In addition, I suggest that through development, the cultural value of the chambira has undergone a major transition.

## Introduction

Doña Patricia's hands are worn and calloused. She holds one hand firmly about the basket and pulls the bundled fibers around the base with a determined movement and then quickly passes the needle around the fibers, pulling them tightly. This is a motion that she will complete over and over again as she works to weave one of the many **chambira** baskets that she will sell to support her family. Doña Patricia's story is similar to that of many of the women in the villages of the Tahuayo. She started weaving over a decade ago and now she produces baskets for tourists visiting her small Amazonian village as well as for export. She has become reliant on the chambira palm (*Astrocaryum chambira*) for her livelihood and her work connects her to buyers from around the world. This article is about resource use and conservation in Northeast Peru and details the role of *chambira* weaving in the lives of the residents of the Tahuayo.

Located 100km south of the city of Iquitos, the **Área de Conservación Regional Comunal Tamshiyacu – Tahuayo** (ACRCTT) was established in 1991 as the Tamshiyacu – Tahuayo Reserva Comunal (TTCR) and is named for the rivers that serve to mark the boundaries of the reserve. The ACRCTT currently extends to more than 420,000 hectares (over one million acres) and represents a unique attempt at combining conservation and development. Since its establishment in 1991, the ACRCTT has experienced a significant growth in tourism and a corresponding growth in local crafts that are marketed to tourists. The most common crafts are baskets that are woven from the fibers of the chambira palm and marketed to tourists who visit the region. In addition, the baskets are exported for international sale.

The goal of this article is to address the growing chambira weaving industry with regard to equity and the Department for International Development (DFID) Sustainable Livelihoods Framework. The framework is used to assess the feasibility of implementing sustainable development projects as well as to analyze existing projects. Utilizing ethnographic evidence from research conducted in 2012, 2013, and 2014, this article uses the DFID framework to assess the contribution that chambira palm weaving makes to the communities of the Tahuayo.

Research for this project focused on surveys and corresponding interviews pertaining to chambira use in three communities associated with the ACRCTT. The communities of study for this project include the villages of El Alto (pop. ~ 200, forty-five households), San Jacinto (pop. ~ 40, seven households), and Ayacucho (pop. ~ 50, eight households). All of the communities are comprised of individuals of mixed ethnic descent, referred to locally as **ribereños**, or river people. The term *ribereño* refers as much to livelihood strategies as ethnicity and is used to characterize rural peasant populations of the Peruvian Amazon who rely on fishing, hunting, and extractive resource activities to make a living (Chibnik 1994, Padoch 1988).

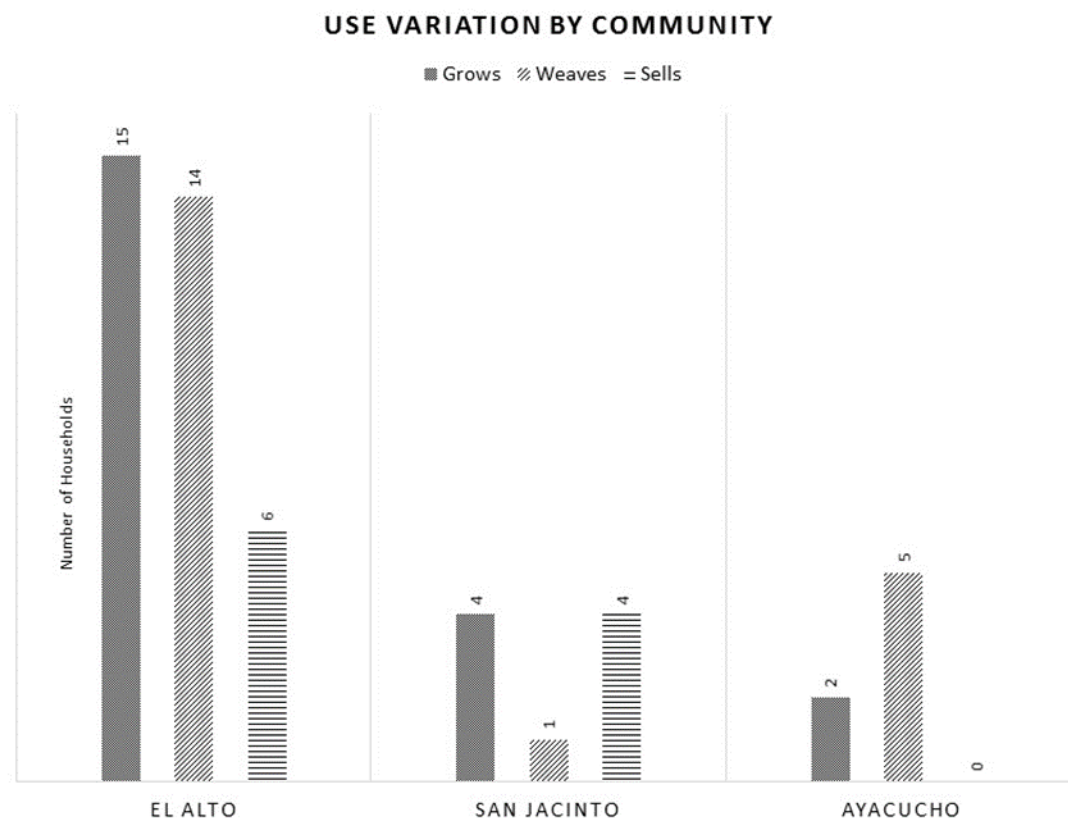
An important feature of *ribereño* identity is the strong presence of indigenous cultural influences (Chibnik 1991; Bauer 2014) that take the form of indigenous knowledge as well as indigenous language. While all three of the communities associated with this project are *ribereño* communities, various indigenous cultural contributions including Shuar and Yagua exist in the communities of El Alto and San Jacinto, and Ayacucho is a designated indigenous Achuar community. The total number of surveys/interviews conducted was thirty-four with



the distribution of surveys/interviews being twenty in El Alto, seven in San Jacinto, and seven in Ayacucho.

The goal was to understand intercommunity variation of chambira use including cultivation and weaving practices, along with gaining insight into historical changes in the use of chambira. Consultants were asked whether or not they cultivate chambira, if they harvest wild chambira, whether or not their use of chambira includes weaving or sale of unprocessed chambira, when they began weaving chambira, how they began weaving

**Figure 1: Use Variation of Chambira by Community**



chambira, what inspires the artistic designs chosen for weaving, and how the use of chambira has changed during their lifetimes. They were also asked to provide a qualitative explanation of the importance of chambira (See Figure One).<sup>4</sup>

In what follows, I begin with a discussion of equity, development, and conservation, followed by a brief review of the history of the ACRCTT and then turn to addressing the contemporary state of the reserve with an explicit focus on alternative economic strategies. In doing so, I address the DFID Framework in order to analyze the contributions of chambira palm exploitation to the communities of the Tahuayo.

## Equity, Development, and Conservation:

The concept of equity is a frequent constituent of the scholarly literature on development. In its most idealistic sense, the concept of equity suggests that benefits should be divided equally or that all participants in development should have equal access to participation in projects and to development resources. However, this is largely unrealistic as not all participating members in development projects have equal roles.

Moreover, the politics of development, as discussed by Bauer

(2009), often prevent the realization of equitable change. With this in mind and from a development perspective, "equity is based on the idea of moral equality" where relevance and consistency of practices are central features (Jones 2009:3). Development projects should address issues of cultural relevance and should do so in a consistent fashion. Equity should not be understood as creating equality or the equal division of resources, but as is the case with most development projects, equity should be understood with reference to ensuring that basic needs are met and that people have the opportunity to improve their livelihoods (Miller et al. 1995).

A common criticism of conservation efforts is that they frequently emphasize environmental or habitat conservation, but neglect to incorporate issues of cultural conservation. At the extreme end of the spectrum is the protectionist paradigm that argues that conservation

and human use of protected lands are incompatible and that conservation of biodiversity has an intrinsic value that supersedes utilitarian value (see Terborgh 1999, 2000). On the other side, alternative approaches recognize the relevance of involving native communities in conservation processes (see Redford and Stearman 1993). Correspondingly, there is a growing focus on understanding conservation not solely from a protectionist perspective, but also with regard to sustainable use of resources by native peoples (Kramer and van Schaik 1997). Redford and Stearman (1993) provide relevant insights into this issue while focusing on the Amazonian context and concluding that



"conservationists should work with native peoples as equal partners in developing alternative strategies to forest destruction, listening to their needs, and learning from indigenous experience...supporting indigenous land rights continues to offer the best hope for conserving and rationally using those tropical forests not contained within national parks" (254). While the challenges of engaging local residents in conservation efforts are numerous, there is a need to recognize indigenous rights to territory while at the same time avoiding creating a caricature of natives as environmental stewards and shepherds of conservation (Redford and Sanderson 2000).

One way of engaging local communities in conservation efforts is to formulate corresponding development strategies that will be of benefit to local communities. However, as numerous scholars note, combining conservation and development is not an easy task (Berkes 2004; Campbell and Vainio-Mattila 2003; Marcus 2001; Pollini 2011; Walley 2004; Young 1999) and might even represent a "fundamental conflict" (Bodmer and Lozano 2001:1164; Kramer and van Schaik 1997:7) as even the most well-conceived development practices have an environmental impact. When conservation and development are combined, the concept of equity shifts from signifying an attempt at fairness, justice, and equal opportunity to a focus on how development fills the economic and livelihood void left by conservation. More directly, conservation efforts frequently impact the livelihoods of native peoples through the protection of natural resources and imposed limitations on resource use. In order for conservation to occur in an equitable manner, alternative livelihood strategies must be made available to ensure that conservation efforts do not have a negative impact on local cultures.

In the case of conservation and development, a fundamental concern should be to address equity with regard to the opportunities provided by development and how such opportunities offset the cost of conservation. Thus, equitable development, as coupled with conservation, not only serves to support conservation efforts, but also creates equal access to alternative livelihood strategies that create equal or greater opportunities than those diminished by conservation.

## Foundations of the ACRCTT:

The creation of the ACRCTT was a direct response to a long history of resource exploitation and a perceived need by locals to implement a conservation plan that would put an end to extractive resource use. The ACRCTT is a unique case because it originated as a communally managed reserve that received significant support from the scientific community and foreign researchers with ongoing projects in the area.

Early intensive resource exploitation in the Tahuayo occurred in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as part of the Amazonian rubber boom. The rubber trade resulted in high levels of cultural contact as colonizers, white, **mestizo**, and Asian, came into contact with indigenous populations of the Amazon basin and its tributaries including indigenous Achuar, Bora, Campa, Cocama, Shipibo, and Yagua. Intermediaries, or traders, set up posts at locations along major waterways and navigable

tributaries and purchased locally extracted materials in exchange for consumer goods. Related to this was an increase in the extraction of timber products in order to provide the lumber necessary for the growth of the city Iquitos as well as the numerous smaller towns and villages that developed along trade routes.

A second major wave of resource extraction took place in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century as the growth of Iquitos as a commercial center, now defined largely by growing petroleum and tourism industries, expanded the need for resources, once again into the Amazonian interior. Wild game and fish harvested in more remote areas of the Amazon including the area that is now the ACRCTT were shipped via river to Iquitos to be sold in city markets to sustain a population that had grown to over a quarter million people. As Iquitos grew, so did the pressures on native resources in outlying areas. These pressures in part led to demographic shifts as interior groups moved closer to trade centers to exchange forest products (game and fish) for consumer goods. The village of El Alto is one such example. Local consultants tell of the history of the village as having a direct link to a **comerciante** (trader) who set up a trading post along the Tahuayo River in the mid twentieth century. He worked closely with the local ribereño population to expand commercial interest for fish and game throughout the area. As the commercial interests grew, so did the population of El Alto. Today El Alto, named for the trader, is a community with various indigenous and non-indigenous influences and is one of the most prominent communities associated with the ACRCTT.

The creation of the ACRCTT was a direct response to the overexploitation of forest resources. As told to me by community leaders and documented in the work of biologists Newing and Bodmer (2004), the region of the Tahuayo experienced tremendous pressures for resources especially during the decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Prior to 1969, large tracks of land were held by once prominent rubber patrons. With the advent of agrarian reform, land was transferred from private patron control to village control. However, in many remote rural villages, organizational structures were not in place to effectively manage land. The result was what in effect amounted to the conversion of land from private property, controlled by patrons, to immense tracks of open access forest. The 1969 change in land tenure ushered in a period of intense resource exploitation and an increasing number of traders moved into the area to purchase goods including game meat, animal pelts, and forest products and overfishing became increasingly common as freezer boats from Iquitos were loaded with fish caught from the numerous oxbow lakes and transported back to Iquitos for sale (Newing and Bodmer 2004).

The initial step in conservation and resource protection came in the form of local communities in the area of the Tahuayo petitioning for and receiving government recognition of the rights of local communities to use and protect resources. Support from biologists working in the area lent credibility to the community activists who pushed for increased control and management of their territories. By 1988 the area had been classi-



fied a “reserve under study” with limited control being granted to local communities. It was not until 1991 that the ACRCTT was officially formed, then known as the TTCR, under the auspices of a unique law that granted for the establishment of a communal reserve and afforded communities the ability to coordinate directly with the regional government as opposed to having to interact with the burdensome bureaucracy of national government as would be the case in the formation of a national park or national reserve (Newing and Bodmer 2004). The ACRCTT was established originally with four communities and allowed for community residents to have direct control over the management of the reserve. Today the ACRCTT has grown to include ten communities whose residents manage and oversee the activities of the reserve.

## Conservation and Development: An Alternative Livelihood Strategy

Environmental conservation often faces challenges when viable economic alternatives to conservation are not part of a conservation strategy and a significant amount of debate exists regarding sustainable development and conservation. The restrictions put in place with the creation of the ACRCTT not only limit outsider access to natural resources, but also limit native access to resources. Although the management plan that was put in place in 1991 has undergone various revisions in consultation with community members and researchers, the plan still imposes strict limits on resource utilization for commercial purposes. Residents of ACRCTT communities practice a mixed subsistence strategy of hunting, fishing, gathering, and horticulture. While all three activities are still allowed within the parameters of the reserve, hunting and fishing are limited in scale. The current regulations do not allow fishing for commercial purposes and only allow for the use of hand fishing and small gill nets for residents of ACRCTT communities. Hunting is currently limited as well. Timber products have similar restrictions on their use with products only being harvested for construction within communities and not for commercial sale or trade.

Most locals recognize the value of environmental management and they testify to the results of the communal management strategy. For example, in a meeting with Don José, he referenced the ban on hunting monkeys as a positive for the communities of the ACRCTT and he stated that he recalls when seeing monkeys was relatively rare due to hunting. However, as he related, and confirmed by my own experiences, monkeys are now quite common even in close proximity to ACRCTT villages, as they no longer view humans as a significant threat. Don José made similar statements about the local fishery and the decline experienced in the 1980s and the subsequent increase in fishery's resources since the establishment of the reserve. However, Don José, like many other residents, spoke candidly about the challenges of conservation management. Specifically, Don José expressed the difficulty in providing for his family given the restrictions imposed by the ACRCTT. Don José is not unique in his perspective and similar sentiments were expressed to me by

numerous residents across the various ACRCTT communities. However, the majority of the individuals that I spoke with acknowledged the importance of conservation and the economic alternatives made possible by conservation in conjunction with ecotourism.

Like many communal reserves, the communities of the ACRCTT share a long history of close relationships with outsiders. The most notable connections come in the form of biologists working throughout the area since the 1980s. The development of an ecotourism lodge, and the more recent development of a research center, have a strong influence in shaping the ACRCTT and the lives of local residents. The Amazon Lodge was founded in the late 1980s by a U.S. trained biologist and has remained at the forefront of conservation and development efforts in the region and in many ways the Amazon Lodge represents the single most important economic alternative available to ACRCTT communities. Recognizing this, the lodge has undertaken development initiatives to provide alternative income generating strategies to residents of local communities. One such alternative is the production of crafts explicitly for the tourist market.

The most prominent crafts produced in the communities of ACRCTT are made from the leaf fibers of the chambira palm. The chambira palm is a native species and is noted for its utilitarian value amongst indigenous and ribereño residents of the northwest Amazon. The earliest accounts of the use of chambira by peoples of the Amazon date to the early twentieth century (Burret 1934; Hardenburg 1910) and chambira is noteworthy amongst the wide variety of ethnobotanical resources utilized by Amazonian peoples due to its wide distribution as well as its utilitarian value. The use of the palm requires the processing of the leaves into utilizable fibers and in its most traditional use, the fibers are dried and woven into hammocks, fishing nets, bags, and also fishing line. However, corresponding temporally to the creation of the reserve, these traditional uses have given way to the use of chambira in the making of crafts to be marketed to tourists with the most important craft being woven baskets.

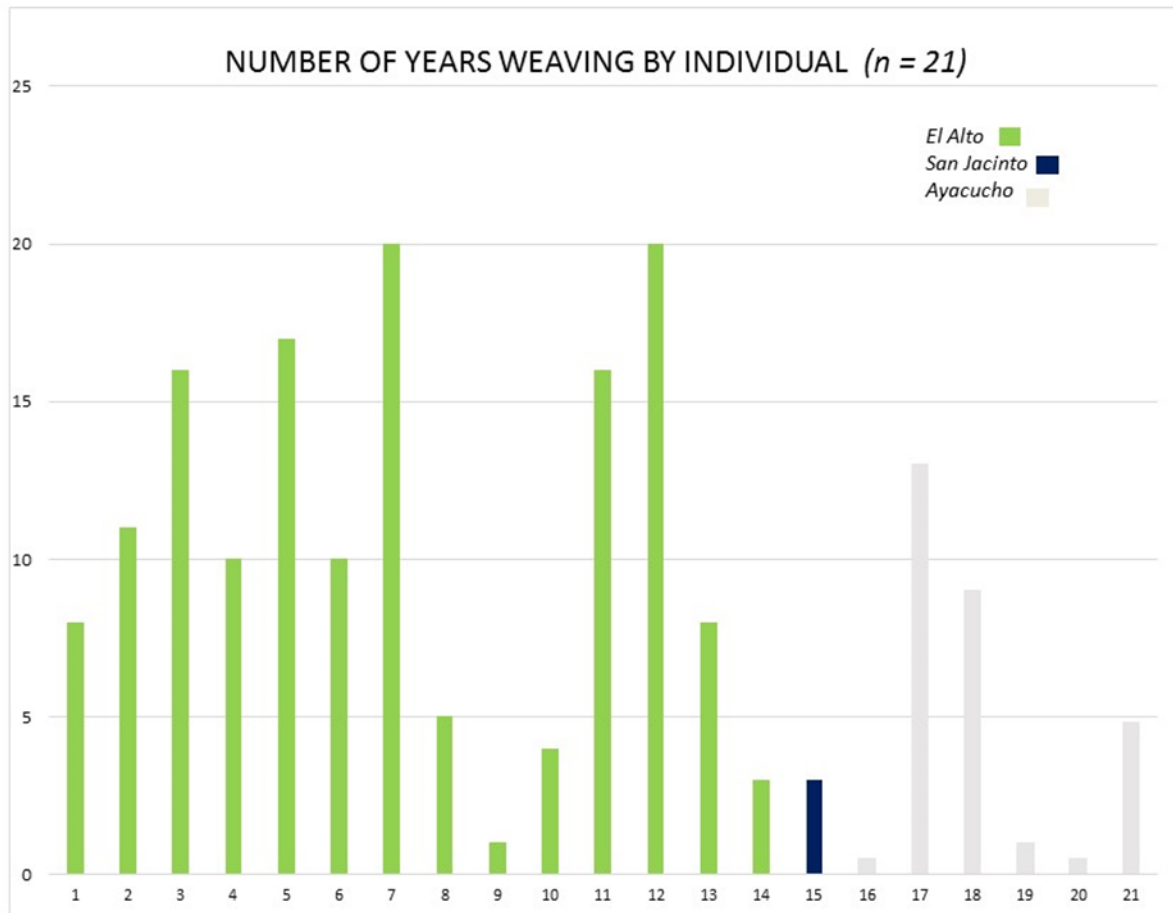
Chambira weaving in the Tahuayo region is widespread and it is common to encounter artisans in nearly all of the villages of the ACRCTT. However, weaving is not a practice with a long and storied tradition. Weaving at least in its present form, has a relatively recent origin that has been fostered by the local tourism lodge. Data from each of the three study communities supports this. In each community weavers were asked the length of time that they have been weaving. In El Alto the average was just under eleven years with the most experienced weaver having been involved in weaving for twenty years. In San Jacinto only one consultant worked in weaving and she has been doing so for three years. In Ayacucho the average number of years is just under five years and the most experienced weaver has thirteen years of experience (See Figure Two).

Accounts of the development of the chambira palm weaving industry in the Tahuayo vary slightly from community to community with agreement on the fact that the wife the owner of the





Figure 2: Number of Years Weaving



tices of chambira is being conducted by the Rainforest Conservation Fund (RCF). In addition, the production of baskets has taken the shape of not one, but two cooperatives comprised of a total of approximately 50 women and men who are dedicated to the craft (Photo One). The baskets have undergone a major transition in the last decade plus. Baskets now include elaborate designs and native plant dyes are used to create vibrant colors (Photo Two). The sale of baskets is not limited to

lodge was instrumental in promoting weaving throughout the communities. When baskets were first being produced for tourists, nearly 15 years ago, they were stylistically simple and significantly less elaborate than they are today. Baskets lacked the elaborate ornamental beadwork and the vibrant colors that are present in today's baskets. Baskets were also generally produced as a supplement to income generated from other activities and were not produced by artisans who were dedicated to the craft of basket weaving. Instead, women would weave in their free time and basket-weaving was largely an individual activity. Moreover, baskets were only marketed to tourists visiting the nearby lodge.

As tourism in the region grew, so did the emergent basket weaving industry so much so that a 2009 NY Times (Popescu 2009) article featured the growing regional industry and its links to a global market and scholars of conservation and ecology have also paid attention. For example, Coomes (2004) provides an economic analysis of chambira palm use, and work by Guel and Penn (2009) focuses on cultivation and management of chambira palms, while ongoing work on growing prac-

tourists who visit the lodge, but extends to a growing export business with baskets being shipped to the United States and Canada. The export business is supported by the *Programa de Conservación, Gestión y Uso Sostenible de la Diversidad Biológica de Loreto* (PROCREL) and production and conservation of chambira is facilitated by the RCF.

### Applying the DFID Framework

Chambira palm weaving represents a significant contribution to communities of the ACRCTT. One way to assess this contribution is by using the DFID Framework. The DFID Framework is used by development professionals to plan and assess development projects. One of the important applications of the DFID Framework is the ability to examine the development context with reference to assets. Doing so, attempts to ascertain "whether or not people are positioned to take advantage of the types of benefits offered from community conservation interventions" (Igoe 2006:74). Thus, the DFID can serve as a baseline for understanding the appropriateness or feasibility of implementing a specific project. The DFID is also valuable as a



# The Applied Anthropologist

BAUER

Equity, Development, & Conservation...

Photo 1: Women Weavers of the ACRCTT



Photo 2: Baskets and Basket Making Materials



means to assess the successes of projects after implementation. The DFID uses the assets of *human capital*, *social capital*, *natural capital*, *physical capital*, and *financial capital* in the planning and assessment of development projects. In what follows, each asset is addressed as it relates to the *chambira* weaving industry of the ACRCTT. The focus is not on a specific project, as basket weaving in the Tahuayo falls under the guise of multiple projects that have the same goal of improving rural livelihoods. Moreover, many artisans participate in multiple weaving groups. Therefore creating a distinction between individual projects is challenging if not problematic.

**Human Capital** - Refers to the skills, knowledge, attributes, and capacities that individuals have and that allow them to achieve their livelihoods. Labor is also an important component. In the case of many development contexts, labor begins at the household level. Human capital is an important consideration in the implementation of any development project. Concern must be taken for the availability of labor as well as the knowledge of appropriate skills. *Chambira* palm weaving relies fundamentally on household labor with women providing the majority of the labor for weaving while men provide the majority of the labor for cultivation and harvesting of *chambira* palm fibers. For most women, weaving is a task that is accomplished throughout the day while other household tasks are simultaneously accomplished. In this way, the task of weaving does not appear to be a laborious task as women work at their own pace. However, in some cases weaving can become a strain on human capital. This is particularly the case where baskets are produced for export. Exported baskets are standardized. As Doña Elena explained, "It is more difficult now because we have to produce all of the baskets the same." She went on to suggest that the pressure to produce in quantity,

and with little stylistic variation, can cause added stress. For this reason, numerous artisans choose not to produce for the export business.

**Social Capital** – Emphasizes networks and connections that can occur both formally and informally as well as relationships of trust and reciprocity. NGOs and government agencies represent important components of social capital for development and conservation projects. Social capital is an important component of understanding *chambira* weaving. One of the goals of the research for this project was to understand how if and how *chambira* weaving connects communities of the Tahuayo. In doing so, research was conducted in communities that are increasingly distant from Iquitos and the Amazon Lodge. Despite the significant distance separating communities, in some cases a full day's boat trip, *chambira* weaving connects communities economically and socially. For example, in San Jacinto, only one of the households interviewed practices weaving. However, four households cultivate *chambira* and sell the leaves to weavers in the community of El Alto. Thus, weaving in El Alto is supported in part by production in San Jacinto. The most remote community of study, Ayacucho, also has close ties to both El Alto and San Jacinto with family networks extending across all three communities. Moreover, residents in Ayacucho, where the mean number of years practicing *chambira* weaving is 4.8, cite a former resident of Ayacucho who is now living in El Alto as fundamental in the spread of weaving from El Alto to Ayacucho. Of note is that the mean number of years for an individual to practice *chambira* weaving in El Alto is 10.6, or over twice as long as that in Ayacucho. Social capital also includes NGOs and other organizations associated with *chambira* palm weaving. The most influential parties to the growth of



# The Applied Anthropologist

BAUER

Equity, Development, & Conservation...

chambira palm weaving include the Amazon Lodge as well as PROCREL. Both organizations work closely with weavers to market chambira baskets. The Amazon Lodge does so by coordinating weekly markets for tourists and by more recently working to export baskets to a retailer in Washington. PROCREL works with a group of artisans who produce explicitly for export. The RCF works closely with PROCREL to monitor the use of chambira in an attempt to prevent overuse and degradation. All three organizations represent important avenues for weavers of Tahuayo communities to extend their access to markets as well as their social capital. Another important way in which weaver positively impacts social capital is by bringing women of the various communities of the Tahuayo together in a culturally appropriate space for social interaction.

**Natural Capital** – Refers to natural resources that are useful for creating and sustaining a livelihood. This includes land as well as other natural resources and environmental components. Natural capital is of special importance when planning and assessing conservation based development efforts. One of the most important elements of chambira palm weaving as an alternative livelihood strategy is the presence of chambira as a natural resource. Chambira grows in the wild and thrives in abandoned garden plots and secondary forest. It has a high level of natural availability, and until the advent of weaving, it was rarely cultivated. In fact, chambira palms were more often than not cut down or burned. When asked how the value of chambira has changed, consultants responded, “we used to just cut it down”, “it was a plague in our fields”, “it had no importance”, and “it had little value...we would eliminate them...you would be cultivating and get spines in your hands.” In addition to chambira, natural capital is used in the form of numerous native plants that serve as natural dyes and also provide seeds for adornment of baskets. Thus, chambira palm weaving effectively and extensively utilizes natural capital.

**Physical Capital** – Refers to the infrastructural and material components necessary to support livelihoods. Infrastructure can include transportation to markets, access to energy sources, and access to communication technology. Material components include the essential technology and equipment for meeting livelihood objectives. Chambira weaving requires little physical capital. However, the growth of the weaving industry has resulted in changes in access to physical capital. The most significant asset that has been added to support the chambira weaving is a small covered market areas for displaying goods and conducting workshops. Prior to the construction of the market, sale of baskets and other

goods was conducted outside of the local school in El Alto, where artisans and tourists were exposed to the elements and where goods were displayed on the ground (Photo Two). The construction of the market building, which was supported by the lodge, provides a dedicated space for weaving and market activities and serves as a material symbol of the importance of weaving in El Alto. At the household level, financial gains from chambira weaving have resulted in an increased access to material goods, many of which serve to improve livelihoods. This is detailed in the following section on financial capital.

**Financial Capital** – Refers to the financial resources associated with meeting a livelihood objective. Examples of financial capital include access to credit, available cash flow, and liquid assets. In many cases liquid assets take the form of livestock that can be easily converted into cash. One of the reasons for the success of the chambira weaving industry is that the practice of weaving requires little to no financial capital as an investment. The primary need is for natural capital in the form of chambira palms in addition to the human capital in the form of labor. The economic impacts of weaving are significant and my consultants recognize basket weaving as having a positive impact on the household economy and an ability to increase financial capital. Families of basket weavers have increased their access to cash and to consumer goods. Cash flow from the sale of baskets has made it easier to purchase necessities including kerosene, gasoline, rice, sugar, and soap. Consumer goods including televisions, refrigerators, generators, chain saws, and solar panels are also more common in part due to the income generated by weaving. In addition, weavers have an increased

Photo 3: Artisans Market 2001





# The Applied Anthropologist

BAUER



Equity, Development, & Conservation...

cash flow which allows them to purchase livestock as a supplement to weaving income. As relayed by a prominent weaver in El Alto, weaving provides “more advantages than fishing and hunting, it is a very good economic resource.” Another consultant shared, “it now has a value (economic), before it did not.” Baskets sell for anywhere from \$5 to \$15 depending on size and elaboration and artisans often produce as many as fifteen to twenty baskets per month. For artisans who sell locally, sale of baskets is dependent upon tourism and therefore fluctuates seasonally. Despite this fluctuation, basket weaving is an important contributor to the household economy that not only impacts weavers, but also creates a financial opportunity for those who sell chambira to weavers and the overwhelming recognition of weavers who participated in this project is that weaving makes a positive financial contribution to the household economy.

## Discussion

Chambira palm weaving is a significant component of communities of the ACRCTT. Addressing chambira palm weaving using the DFID Framework allows for a systematic understanding of the impacts of chambira weaving on participating communities. However, more elaboration is needed in order to explicate fully the significance of weaving as a form of development coupled with conservation.

We can begin by returning to the question of equity. One of the important features of equity as related to development projects and conservation is the ability of projects to address issues of cultural relevance and to do so with consistency. In the case of the ACRCTT, providing alternative livelihood strategies in the face of conservation efforts represents a cultural relevant issue for the residents of the ACRCTT. Chambira weaving represents an alternative livelihood strategy that is in direct response to conservation efforts. At a more pragmatic level, equity comes in the form of the opportunity for all community members to participate. This is especially true with those who sell their goods to tourists. Artisans can work at their own pace and can produce the quantity and quality of goods that they desire. In this regard, equity is reflected in the equal opportunity to produce and to sell. However, this does not mean that all artisans achieve equal success. Some artisans produce work of higher quality than others and some are even commissioned to produce baskets that have significantly higher values than the standard baskets that sell for \$5 to \$15.

Gender equity is often the focus of development projects, and while not the explicit focus of the development projects associated with chambira weaving, empowerment of women in participating communities is a consequence of weaving. At the most basic level, weaving allows women to generate income and to provide for their families in a way that was previously not present. And while some men do participate in weaving, it is predominantly a women’s enterprise. However, this is not to suggest that men do not contribute to chambira craft production. Complementarity, as is common in many Amazonian con-

Photo 4: Farmer in Chambira Plantation



texts, is an important component of production.

Conservation and sustainability are additional issues brought forth by an analysis of chambira palm weaving. Guel and Penn (2009) in particular question the sustainability of continued chambira use as a growing market, particularly an export market, increases demand and puts pressure on natural capital. One response to this has been to promote the cultivation of chambira in favor of wild harvesting of chambira and as recently as 2014 the RCF was assessing cultivation of chambira in various ACRCTT communities. Despite concerns regarding the sustainability of chambira harvest and use, residents of the communities of study expressed an increased understanding of the need to conserve chambira as a natural resource as opposed to simply cutting it down or burning it as they used to do prior to the focus on basket weaving. For example, when asked to explain the importance of chambira Doña Lilia explained that the current importance is in “conservation” and a need to “care for and manage” chambira as a natural resource and as an



"economic resource." In a similar manner Doña Marcela referenced the "current management" of chambira as important and the importance of "cultivating more" as opposed to "cutting it down to clear the fields" and Doña Nora asserted that "we respect it more, we care for it, and there is significant interest in growing more." Conservation, care and management are important themes and all of these are being addressed by RCF as it works to monitor chambira cultivation and harvest in individual gardens as well as communal gardens. The net result, as expressed to me by my consultants, is that while use of chambira has increased as a consequence of the advent of basket weaving, community concern for chambira has also increased (Photo Three).

## Conclusion

Development and conservation are often linked both ideologically and practically. Chambira palm weaving represents an important synthesis of conservation and development for the communities of the ACRCTT. Measuring the success of development projects is often a difficult task. The DFID Framework provides a model for analyzing development projects. In this article, this model has been applied in order to gain insights into the consequences of chambira weaving for the assets of human capital, social capital, natural capital, physical capital, and financial capital. To summarize, chambira weaving uses existing human capital, while at times human capital is stretched in order to meet the demands of the export of chambira baskets. Social capital has increased as the networks fostered by basket weaving have been extended to include various organizations, most notably the Amazon Lodge, PROCREL, and RCF. Networks between artisans of different communities have also been fostered, as have exchange networks between communities. Basket weaving has taken advantage of natural capital and an increase in the importance of conservation and management is recognized by most consultants. As such, human relations to chambira have shifted to place an elevated value on a natural resource that was considered to be a nuisance. Access to physical capital has increased in conjunction with financial capital. Chambira weaving has also resulted in the construction of a dedicated communal space for weaving activities and markets. Financial capital has increased for weavers and this has resulted in an increased ability to access consumer goods as well as forms of physical capital that improve livelihoods.

Chambira weaving represents an equitable form of development in that it serves as an alternative livelihood strategy that helps to offset the impacts of conservation efforts that limit traditional forms of resource use. Moreover, the practice of weaving is not limited to particular segments of society. In this way, chambira use represents a shift in resource use and an associated shift in resource value. While this research offers insights into the interface of conservation and development by addressing equity and the DFID Framework, there is still a need to examine the sustainability of increased use of chambira and the long-term impacts of resource exploitation.

## Notes

- 1) A previous version of this article was presented at the 2014 Meetings of the Central States Anthropological Society.
- 2) Pseudonyms are used for names and locations utilized in this research in order to protect the identities of consultants.
- 3) All photos were taken by the author.
- 4) It is important to note that the focus of this study was not to obtain quantitative data pertaining to the economics of chambira.

## Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to the University of Southern Indiana Foundation for support for this project. The author also recognizes Nelly Pinedo Alvarado, Amazonia Expeditions, and the people of the Tahuayo for their assistance with this project. The author also acknowledges the anonymous reviewers of The Applied Anthropologist.

## References

- Arambiza, Evelio and Michael Painter.  
2006. Biodiversity Conservation and the Quality of Life of Indigenous People in the Bolivian Chaco. *Human Organization*. 65(1): 20-34.
- Bauer, Daniel E.  
2009. Community-Based Tourism and the Politics of Development. *The Applied Anthropologist*. 29(2): 98-112.
2014. Identities on the Periphery: *Mestizaje in the Lowlands of South America.* *Delaware Review of Latin American Studies*. 15(2).
- Berkes, Fikret  
2004. Rethinking Community-Based Conservation. *Conservation Biology*. 18(3): 621-630.
- Bodmer, Richard E. and Etersit Pezo Lozano  
2001. Rural Development and Sustainable Wildlife Use in Peru. *Conservation Biology*. 15(4): 1163-1170.
- Burret, M.  
1934. "Die palmengattung *Astrocaryum* G." *Repertorium Specierum Novarum Regni Vegetabilis*. 35: 114-158.
- Campbell, Lisa M. and Arja Vainio-Mattila  
2003. Participatory Development and Community-Based Conservation: Opportunities Missed for Lessons Learned? *Human Ecology*. 31(3): 417-437.
- Chibnik, Michael  
1991. Quasi-Ethnic Groups in Amazonia. *Ethnology*. 30(2): 167-182.  
1994. *Risky Rivers: The Economic and Politics of Floodplain Farming in Amazonia*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Coomes, Oliver T  
2004. Rain forest 'conservation-through-use'? Chambira palm fiber extraction and handicraft production in a land-constrained community, Peruvian Amazon. *Biodiversity and Conservation*. 13. 351-360.
- DFID  
2000. Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets. Department for International Development. <http://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/0901/section2.pdf> (Accessed November 17, 2014).
- Guel, Anel and Penn, Jim  
2009. Use of the chambira palm (*Astrocaryum chambira*) in rainforest communities of the Peruvian Amazon. *Student Summer Scholars*. Paper 20.
- Hardenburg, W. E.  
1910. The Indians of the Putumayo, Upper Amazon. *Man*. 10: 134-138.
- Igoe, Jim  
2006. Measuring the Costs and Benefits of Conservation to Local Communities. *Journal of Ecological Anthropology*. 10:72-77.



Jones, Harry

2009. *Equity in development: Why it is important and how to achieve it*. London: Overseas Development Institute.

Kramer, Randall A. and Carel P. van Schaik

1997. Preservation Paradigms and Tropical Rain Forests. In *Last Stand: Protected Areas & the Defense of Tropical Biodiversity*. Edited by Randall Kramer, Carel van Schaik and Julie Johnson. Pp. 3-14. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marcus, Richard R.

2001. Seeing the Forest for the Trees: Integrated Conservation and Development Projects and Local Perceptions of Conservation in Madagascar. *Human Ecology*. 29(4): 381-397.

Miller, Sandra E., Shinn, Craig W. and William R. Bentley

1995. *Rural Resource Management – Problem Solving for the Long Term*. Ames: Iowa State University Press.

Newing, Helen and Richard Bodmer

2004. Collaborative Wildlife Management and Adaptation to Change: The Tamshiyacu – Tahuayo Communal Reserve, Peru. *Nomadic Peoples*. 7(1): 110-122.

Padoch, Christine

1988. People of the floodplain and forest. Pages 127-140 in J. S. Denslow and C. Padoch, eds., *People of the tropical rain forest*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Pollini, Jacques

2011. The Difficult Reconciliation of Conservation and Development Objectives: The Case of the Malagasy Environmental Action Plan. *Human Organization*. 70(1): 74-87.

Popescu, Roxana

2009. For Peruvians, Baskets for the U.S. Market Bring a New Way of Life. *New York Times*. January 19, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/20/business/worldbusiness/20peru.html?pagewanted=all> (Accessed May 22, 2013)

Redford, Kent H. and Allyn Maclean Stearman

1993. Forest-Dwelling Native Amazonians and the Conservation of Biodiversity: Interests in Common or Collision? *Conservation Biology*. 7(2): 248-255.

Redford, Kent H. and Steven E. Sanderson

2000. Extracting Humans from Nature. *Conservation Biology*. 14(5): 1362-1364.

Terborgh, John

1999. *Requiem for Nature*. Washington D.C.: Island Press.

2000. The Fate of Tropical Forests: A Matter of Stewardship. *Conservation Biology*. 14(5): 1358-1361.

Walley, Christine J.

2004. *Rough Waters: Nature and Development in an East African Marine Park*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Young, Emily H.

1999. Balancing Conservation with Development in Small-Scale Fisheries: Is Ecotourism and Empty Promise? *Human Ecology*. 27(4): 581-620.





# The Applied Anthropologist

Vol. 35

No. 2

2015

## THE LITTLE APPLE: ETHNIC CONFLICT, EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STRUGGLES IN A BOSNIAN TOWN—A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

PETER W. VAN ARSDALE, LESLIE P. WOODWARD, AND VELMA ŠARIĆ

### ABSTRACT

"In Vareš, promises outweigh prospects, and prospects outweigh production." During the post-civil war period (i.e., since 1995), this phrase has become a virtual mantra for the central Bosnian town we call the "Little Apple." The study is not theoretic but rather, represents an unusual (in the field of Bosnian ethnographic research) longitudinal community appraisal of persistence, survival, and "getting by" at the margins. It demonstrates the value of an applied anthropology perspective and the value of qualitative methods as both changes and challenges are tracked in one place, over a 12-year period (2002 – 2014). This effort illustrates the municipality's ethnic conflict, educational challenges, and socioeconomic struggles, these mirroring Bosnia's broader issues. The collapse of the Vareš mining industry is indicative, but does not offer a singular explanation. "Identity politics" does, as these dynamics are considered along with educational constraints. Yet, recent developments offer cautious optimism. A 2013 mayoral strategic plan provides a useful framework. Sustained by a combination of larger-scale external investments, smaller-scale internal investments, and well coordinated canton-level administrative leadership, positive changes can be effected. A greater focus on principles of public administration will help. While the mining industry can be revitalized somewhat, this should not come to again dominate the Vareš economy. Sustainable livelihoods must be created across multiple sectors, while tapping the potential of youth who, in fact, are already well-educated. Effective, localized socioeconomic strategies can trump ideologically constraining identities.

**KEY WORDS:** Bosnia, ethnic conflict, socioeconomics, education, applied anthropology

### Introduction

Passing through a long, twisting valley cut by a small stream, one eventually reaches the mountain town of Vareš. The road is paved, with plenty of potholes, and therefore by all accounts, is not much worse and not much better than other roads in central Bosnia. Local residents will at one and the same time stress that they are "distant" from the capital, Sarajevo, in terms of service access and economic support, yet "near" in terms of social connections and familial ties. While a map confirms that Vareš is only 40 kilometers northeast of Sarajevo, a merchant indicates that it is "in a different world."

The mountains of the surrounding range reach a thousand meters above the town. Sub-alpine forests blanket the slopes. Upland villages dot the terrain and indeed, are considered part of "greater Vareš." The municipality covers 390 km<sup>2</sup> with a large number of scattered settlements. The population of the municipality is estimated at 10,000 inhabitants, a drastic change from the 22,200 who lived there in 1991. The town of Vareš proper has about 5,000 residents. Since relatively few villagers own cars, people can regularly be seen trudging up and down the side roads leading to Vareš proper. Women in high heels and fancy dresses often will walk "down" to the town from "up" in the neighboring hills. In this sense, it is a place of some importance, a place to go, "a place down there, in the valley." Yet, as will be shown, the role of upland villages is significant. During the height of its mining activities,

it was known for the lead, zinc, and barite it produced.

Vareš and the immediately surrounding area comprise a diverse and economically fragmented ethnoscape. Part of the Zenica-Doboj Canton, it was hit hard by the 1992 – 1995 civil war. Yet there is a degree of cohesion, as "community" is discussed among the mayor and town council; teachers and school administrators; and businesspeople and blue-collar workers. High school students express both frustration with the lack

**Figure 1: The abandoned barite mine's central building overlooks the town's periphery.**



of economic opportunities, often stating that they would like to emigrate elsewhere, and pride in the town's heritage, often stating that – if things just turned around a bit – they would like to remain. A classroom visited by the first author in 2002 was working on developing a summer-school newsletter. One boy suggested it be named the “Little Apple” in honor of his town. “We’re not like the Big Apple [New York City], but we have things we’re proud of. We have a past and a future. We’re the Little Apple.”

## Identity and Ethnic Conflict

Our longitudinal study spans 12 years, from 2002 to 2014. Our ethnographic/historical analytic approach is grounded in applied anthropology, and employed participant observation, key informant interviews, and content analysis of published and unpublished documents. Approximately 30 people were interviewed extensively. We have been able to document what has changed and what has not. How is it that a town ravaged by war and fraught with ethnic conflict survives? How is it that people of different ethnic/religious orientations and affiliations seemingly both revile and revere one another, simultaneously? What is the role that inside agents of change play in the socio-economic landscape, and that outside agents of change play in shaping insiders’ opportunities? Interpretively, what is the role of identity politics?

Ethnicity has been shaped and reshaped continuously (albeit irregularly) over a documented millennium or more in this region of the Balkans (Malcolm 1996). In approximate order, from most to least strong, have been biogenetic, linguistic, religious, and sociopolitical factors. While all the major ethnic groups have been impacted, Bosnian Muslim identity has been the most forcibly reshaped, by Ottomans, Serbs, and Croats. Ustasha and Chetnik factions created havoc in the region during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with a stereotypical and even caricatured “shaping of ethnic extremes.” After the Dayton Accords of 1995 brought the devastating civil war to an end, the country was subdivided by external powers into two entities, the Bosnian/Bosniak-Croat Federation and the Serbian Republic. By external international design, the former comprises precisely 51% of the country, the latter precisely 49%. Vareš is located in the Federation, which is about 70% Bosniak/Muslim, 25% Croat, and 5% Serb (Brunwasser 2011: 2). Overall, the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina was recently calculated at 3.79 million.

Building on the earlier work of Malcolm (1996) and Hayden (1996), as well as the more recent research of Diegoli (2007), long-standing issues of evolving ethnic identities, nationalism, and cultural re-identification – solidified by “collective memory” – confound the picture. Opportunities that might be enhanced are constrained as ethnic battles, real and imagined, play out time and again. To paraphrase Filandra (2003: 119), the tensions cannot be totally dissolved. The ethnic divide cannot appreciably be improved. Fratricidal acts will continue. In a place like Vareš, where the economic situation is depressed, our longitudinal research indicates these tensions have been magnified even further.

Respondents we interviewed over a 12-year period stated that ethnic divisions are partially “internally driven” and partially “externally driven.” These same countervailing forces drive the desired unity, also. A unity that is more than symbolic is needed, they say, but not like that imposed by Josip Broz Tito under an authoritarian rule which lasted until 1980.

## The War and Societal Disruption

The Bosnian civil war lasted from 1992 through 1995. Estimates vary, but it is likely that as many as 200,000 people were killed and over one million displaced by the time the Dayton Peace Accords were announced in November of 1995 – this from a population of less than five million. Warring parties represented multiple factions. Croat, Serb, and Muslim forces at various times fought against – and in the case of Croats and Muslims –with one another. External combatants representing what came to be known as the “rump Yugoslavia” (i.e., Serbia and Montenegro) were engaged in substantial ways. Bosnia’s continued partitioning and unusual segmentary parliamentary configuration has perpetuated these fault lines.

Somewhat removed from mainstream/cosmopolitan Bosnian society, as defined by Sarajevans, the people of Vareš were not directly impacted by the war at first. As fighting expanded in other parts of the country during 1992, Vareš remained relatively isolated and relatively intact. However, by the spring of 1993 tensions had increased between Croats and Muslims in central Bosnia, exacerbated and complicated by the activities of Serbs in the central and eastern regions of the country. A complicated set of tripartite, inter-ethnic battles and battlelines was emerging, among three armies. On June 10<sup>th</sup> B-H Army soldiers attacked Croat residents of Kakanj, a town some 20 kilometers west of Vareš. Within a week more than 10,000 Croat refugees from Kakanj had arrived in the Vareš district. Located in more open and less mountainous terrain than Vareš, Kakanj was an easy target for troops proceeding on foot, by means of vehicles, and through the air. Many of those termed

**Figure 2: Commemorative plaques, recalling the lives of martyrs, are found throughout Bosnia.**





“refugees” (technically, IDPs) were able to seek refuge with relatives in Vareš.

On October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1993, the first substantive attack of the war was mounted on Vareš. Moving from west to east, up the valley, B-H Army soldiers stormed the strategically important position of Lijesnica and by the next day had attacked the primarily Croat-populated village of Kopjari. Some claimed this was triggered by an earlier Croat-led massacre. Six Bosnian Croats were killed, these being among the first civilian casualties of the war in the Vareš area. Within a week, B-H Army units represented by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuzla Corps, 3<sup>rd</sup> Zenica Corps, 6<sup>th</sup> Visoko Corps, and the Vikic Special Unit had blanketed much of the district.

Fighting in the area was intermittent after that. Vareš was never a central thrust, nor a central threat, during the war. Its mountain location, while moderately important, was never strategic to either the B-H Army, Croat defenders, or Serbian troops. The war drew to a close in 1995, with the Dayton Peace Accords being signed in Paris on December 14<sup>th</sup>. Ethnic tensions remained high in Vareš. The “Little Apple” was down, but not entirely out.

## The Cultural, Sociopolitical, and Socioeconomic Landscape: Pioneering Studies

While a number of important ethnographic studies have been conducted in Yugoslavia (and the republics like Bosnia which subsequently seceded from it), the present research has been informed most substantively by the work of four anthropologists whose research spanned 50 years.

In the early 1950s, anthropologist Joel Halpern (1967; orig. 1956) spent nearly two years in the village of Orašac in Serbia, followed by more fieldwork a decade later. He was assisted by his wife Barbara Kerewsky-Halpern, who subsequently published other significant research on the Balkans (e.g., 1981). Orašac is located about 75 kilometers south of Belgrade, in the Šumadija region, and while not similar to the Vareš region in an environmental or ecological sense, is similar in a socioeconomic sense. Farming, light industry, and mining characterized Orašac over fifty years ago, and characterize Vareš today. Of more importance to the present analysis, the Halperns’ insights into the ethnic and economic landscape, in the face of at-times grinding poverty and post-WWII sociopolitical disruption, set the stage for contemporary understandings of village life in other regions of the former Yugoslavia.

The present analysis also was inspired by the ethnographic work of Tone Bringa. Based on research conducted during the early 1990s, while the civil war raged, her book *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way* (1995) follows the tradition of Halpern and Kerewsky-Halpern as she lays out life in a small village in central Bosnia. Whereas the Halperns focused more on identity maintenance, while touching on issues of socioeconomic change, Bringa focuses more on identity transformation, while emphasizing issues of sociopolitical change. The community where she worked was disintegrating. Like Vareš, the village she terms

Dolina contained both Croat and Muslim residents. Like Vareš, the war caused significant disruption and dislocation.

The work of Anders Stefansson (2004) also has informed the present research. His fieldwork is the most recent of the four prominent anthropologists cited here, and also is the most applied. His focus within Bosnia has been on returnees (i.e., those displaced by the war who have chosen to return). “Narratives of mobility” are well-summarized by Stefansson, and appropriately move contemporary ethnographic analyses from traditional notions of cultural stability (as reflected in a nexus of integrative sociopolitical and socioeconomic forces) to notions of cultural flux (as reflected in a nexus of fragmentary yet not necessarily destructive sociopolitical and socioeconomic forces). His work in Sarajevo, as well as some of Bosnia’s rural areas, indicates that “homecomings” can be achieved by refugees and internally displaced persons, but that these events must be seen in pragmatic – not esoteric or abstract theoretic – ways. Like Bringa, his research indicates that forces of change and continuity both are at work. Not surprisingly, people struggle and people survive.

## Educational Struggles

What first attracted us to Vareš was the opportunity to work with primary and secondary school children through a university-based service learning program (Van Arsdale 2008).

Bosnian educators, often pushed by politicians who may not fully understand educational fundamentals, have variously suggested decentralization, centralization, integration, and segregation as post-war strategies. Those who have promoted decentralization and segregation often have touted what Bringa had termed “ethnoreligious” approaches; she earlier suggested (1995) that some citizens state that there are “Catholic (Croat) ways,” “Orthodox (Serbian) ways,” and “Muslim (Bosniak) ways” of doing things, that extend beyond religion into other spheres of community life.

**Figure 3: Educational programs have improved with the introduction of inter-linked lap-tops. University of Denver students assisted this initiative.**





# The Applied Anthropologist

VAN ARSDALE ET AL.

The Little Apple...

One educational adaptive strategy, integration, was engaged by the University of Denver's long-standing service learning initiative, Project Bosnia (now called Global Practice Bosnia). It was co-founded by the first author. Utilizing both undergraduate and graduate students from the university, summer programming was conducted in the primary public school of Vareš.<sup>1</sup> Over the span of nearly a decade, the university's students spent up to 8 weeks each summer in this school, focusing on ESL, art, and sports programming. Ethnic labeling was avoided, as students always were referred to as "Bosnians." Yet at day's end, they often returned to enclaved dwellings and activities. "Integration" butted "segregation."

As Brunwasser (2011) reported from a similar Bosnian town, and similar public school, *de facto* segregation based on ethnic identity still exists in places like Vareš. Bosniak – Croat battles have not been forgotten and a "mixed school" is seen as less desirable than one which hides what residents perceive to be obvious ethnic distinctions. That the Vareš high school was renovated in 2010 with funds contributed by the U.S. Embassy was an "infrastructural plus," but did not dispel sociopolitical tensions. That Global Youth Connect is sponsoring successful summer programs in this region, involving both Bosnian and non-Bosnian youth, is promising. That innovative educational efforts aimed at bridging the ethnic divide are underway elsewhere in the country is also promising. For example, spurred by the Rotary Club of Denver and the Rotary Club of Mostar, a program to educate at-risk Roma girls has been started in the Neretva canton, south of Vareš (Muftić and Muftić 2014).

Over the course of this longitudinal study, a number of informants stated that the (re-) establishment of trust among all groups is essential. Young people can, and should, help with this. The basic education that they have been receiving, especially in science and math, is sound. "Intellect, education, and compassion" is the mantra espoused by one highly educated female respondent.

## Socioeconomic Struggles

The total population of Bosnia and Herzegovina was recently calculated at 3.79 million (BiH Census Bureau 2013). Remarkably, recent analyses have put the Bosnian unemployment rate as high as 46%. It averaged 43% from 2007 through early 2014 (Staff, Trading Economics 2014; Staff, eBusiness Services 2013; Staff, Trading Economics 2012). The work of the third author with the Generation TBD Project for *Global Post* placed Bosnia's recent youth unemployment rate at 57.5%, the highest in the world (Šarić 2014). The situation in Vareš mirrored this for most of this period.

Mining's collapse epitomizes the socioeconomic struggles that have confronted the residents of Vareš for 20 years. When the major lead, zinc, and barite mining activities were underway, as many as one thousand residents were employed, directly and indirectly. By 2002, when this longitudinal study began, fewer than one hundred held meaningful mining-related jobs; even the mine manager was also working two other jobs to make ends meet.

**Figure 4: A small market, featuring local produce, dominates the center of town.**



A person interviewed when this research began stated that "fresh ideas, at the grassroots, are needed." A person interviewed within the past year said the same thing. Interviews by our team, as well as "grey literature" produced by members of the Vareš community, have at last provided a more encouraging – yet incomplete – picture.

During the course of this research, three different men who have served as mayor of Vareš were interviewed. The picture which emerges is of people of good will with modest clout and – with one exception, to be discussed – modest insight. Citizens say the same: Leadership in the municipality has been variable. The bureaucracy of Bosnia can be stifling, and this percolates down, through cantons, to municipal levels. "It creates a frustrating mentality," as one said. Meaningful economic and employment opportunities seemingly vanish as one operative leaves and another takes his place. Political will has been lacking.

Touristic opportunities have been touted for decades. Yet, they have not gained significant traction within this municipality. The so-called Kingdom of Bobovac is primary, the wooden mosque at Karić secondary. Poor roads and erratic promotions have hindered tourist access. At times, multilingual high school students have served as eager (even unpaid) guides. Tourists departing from Sarajevo to Bobovac and Karić occasionally have been accompanied by professional guides. The economic impact on Vareš has been minimal.

Scattered garbage and trash was an issue in 2002. By 2014, this situation had been improved markedly. Funding from USAID and SIDA enabled development of an eco-friendly dump. Perhaps too optimistically, this has sparked talk of ecotourism.

## Refugee Perspectives

As part of the longitudinal study, several refugees from Vareš and central Bosnia were interviewed in Colorado. All six fled, in large part, due to economic hardship exacerbated by

the civil war. While ethnic tensions were a correlate, economic pressures were a precipitant. One person mentioned the collapse of the mining industry as primary.

All six stated emphatically that one's ethnicity should make no difference. All stressed that, upon emigration and resettlement in Colorado, their own ethnicity had become less of a factor in daily life and a virtual non-factor in their socioeconomic adaptations. All were well educated and had obtained good jobs. None were living in ethnic enclaves in Colorado. Yet all framed their comments ethnically. To paraphrase one woman, one's past is always present.

In reflecting on their homeland, none were optimistic about its immediate future. Most comments were couched both politically and economically. Neither these respondents, nor most others interviewed in Bosnia itself over the 12-year study period, described what could be called a vibrant political will. Phrases like "politics as usual," "cronyism," and "ethnic politics" were used.

## A Viable Strategic Plan

The most definitive attempt during the post-civil war era to deal strategically with Vareš' problems and prospects has been that led by Mayor Avdiđa Kovačević. Aided by input from other municipal officials and community members, his *Project Ideas Catalogue* (2013) provided numerous facts and figures about the current status of various sectors relevant to the development of Vareš. A clear strategy for creating a base for new employment opportunities, improving infrastructure, developing tourism and ensuring better health care, cultural and sporting facilities – with relevant informational content for both citizens and visitors – was featured. Strikingly, as the catalogue noted, as of 2013 there were more unemployed than employed people in the town: 1300 as compared with 1129.

A catalogue like this is essential; few documents of any definitive type have previously been created, with reliance instead having been placed on scattered issue papers, briefs, and government memoranda. The paper trail has been difficult for community leaders to follow. Each section of the *Project Ideas Catalogue* provided a list of priority projects along with descriptions, complemented by facts/figures/statistics about the town's current condition in the relevant sector. Each section presented information regarding the phase a particular project is currently in, as well as the goals, budget, community-related activities, and anticipated outcomes/benefits the project will likely have on the community. As of 2013 the majority of the projects discussed were in the idea, development, or preparation phase.

Key projects listed as being "in progress" included the production of organic food. With 206 registered agricultural farms and 3 agricultural associations in the municipality with the potential of enhancing market-oriented organic food production, the promise is there. The catalogue suggested better near-term utilization of existing production methods such that significantly larger quantities of organic food can be produced to meet the needs of the local community, as well as immediate neighbors.

Currently that production is mainly restricted to meeting the needs of individual households; a very small percentage is directed toward meeting market demand (2013: 10).

Development of the local community of Strica-Zaruđe also was listed as a strategic priority. This community is comprised of two villages, Strica and Zaruđe, which are located 6 km from the town of Vareš. The villages are tiny, with a total population of 96 residents in 47 families; 19 are children. Although demographically non-representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the villagers' average age of 35 years – in concert with viable community associations – makes these communities attractive models. Work is organized through the Local Community Association, the Civil Association of the Women's Forum of Strica-Zaruđe, and the Association of Strica-Zaruđe. These organizations are also the initiators of various activities which aim to improve the living standards. Externally, the community is oriented towards tourism. Their aim is to develop a "custom product" which will be recognizable to a wide tourist audience (2013: 35). This "upland initiative" holds the promise of replication to other of the municipality's villages, and indeed our interviews have indicated that much of the municipality's innovative thinking has been "upland inspired."

## Recent Investment Activity

Locally-attuned socioeconomic strategies are being complemented by regionally-attuned, multi-sectoral investment strategies. The Government of Japan recently granted nearly 90,000 Euros to the Vareš Health Care Center, as part of its broader program of support for the medical sector in Bosnia. Through 2014, Japan also is supporting sports programming, technology transfer, and school rehabilitation, among other initiatives. Given major floods in early 2014, flood relief also has been substantial. This development and relief aid can be traced to the immediate post-civil war period, when brightly colored electric street cars emblazoned with Japanese logos could be seen on Sarajevo's main thoroughfares. Its Grant Assistance for Grass-roots Projects is innovative (Embassy of Japan 2014).

Italian investment is increasing. Investors of the Company For Spare Parts (known locally as TRD), whose factory in Vareš currently employs 160 people, earlier visited the municipality as part of the *Aftercare Program for 2013*, a network of cooperation for post-investment support to foreign investors in Bosnia. The investors presented investment plans worth 8-10 million Euros to maintain current levels of employment, despite below-level expected profitability. Furthermore, the creation of a second factory was discussed, which would create new jobs and training opportunities within the municipality. That metal parts are being emphasized is a plus, since this builds on Vareš tradition of mining/metals expertise (Staff, Sarajevo Times 2013a). As with Japan, the Italian effort is part of a broader pattern of strategic investment in the country.

In 2012 Balamara Resources Ltd. of Australia acquired its second mining/mineral project rights in the Balkans, this one in Vareš. It sees the prospects for re-development and expansion of lead, zinc, barite, and other mineral resources as substantial.



In concert with Austrian interests, Eastern Mining Ltd. has begun exploratory geological work in Borovica, with a view to reconstructing former lead, zinc, and barite mines in four locations across the Vareš municipality - Veovča, Rupice, Juraševac, and Brestić - with the support of the Ministry of Economy of the Zenica-Doboj Canton. The initial agreement involved a significant concession fee, of which 70 percent has been granted to the municipality of Vareš; nearly 30 jobs were created immediately. Following a five-year exploration period, a further 100 workers are expected to be hired. The work is typical of development in the region; Austrian companies attended meetings in 2013 to express interest in investing in the fields of transport, infrastructure and logistics (Staff, Sarajevo Times 2013b; Staff, eKapija.ba 2014).

China is yet to become "the elephant in the room" in Bosnia, but such a label will not be improbable in the next decade. Chinese investment is underway in wood processing plants. Representatives of the Chinese corporate timber industry Fuzhou Jiu Yuan Trade Company and representatives of the Sarajevo-based company Bluhend Wood met with government officials in 2013 to discuss the second stage of investment and expansion of a primary wood processing plant in Vareš. The implementation of this phase may see an increase in employment from 70 to 120 jobs, with a third-stage to increase this number by a further 200 (Staff, eKapija.ba 2013).

## Interpretations and Conclusions

Insider, outsider, us, them, other - all terms that have been used to variously describe what Bosnians as a whole, and as members of several ethnic and ethno-religious groups, represent (see, e.g., Coles 2002). The roles that other nations, as well as international agencies and organizations, have played in this "labeling process" cannot be overstated. That a number of our informants blamed "others" for the post-civil war divisiveness also cannot be overstated. As of 2014 there still were nearly a thousand international peacekeepers in the country.

Early on, in the immediate post-civil war period, Hayden (1996) accurately captured the processes at play in the new post-Yugoslav republics. Constitutions were being created that both promoted emergent democracies while reifying "cultures" in ways that enabled legal justification for processes of exclusion. This particularly was the case in Bosnia, where an externally-driven two-part, sub-state structure - the Federation and the Republic - was created. While suppressing overt manifestations of still-bubbling hostilities, a new socio-political structure that implicitly supported ethnic segregation was enshrined. The notion of what we would term "rotating ethnic presidencies" even was introduced.

Passive co-existence was a goal of some. Hromadžić (2011) sees consociational democracy unfolding in Bosnia, such that co-existence and nominal agreement among divergent political elites becomes the norm. When combined with ineffective political parties and ongoing international governance *cum* oversight, war-generated ethnic segregation inevitably continues. Hromadžić sees institutionalized separation of Bosnia's eth-

nic groups as a correlate of this. Borrowing from the insightful work of Little-Siebold (2001), whose Guatemalan analysis can be applied to Bosnia, tensions between "official categories" and "continued local-level diversity" are shown in the way in which state power is manifest. Despite proclamations and policies to the contrary, the state in fact lacks the ability to bring about meaningful, inter-ethnic transformations. Identities are not simply labels, or "us - them dichotomies," to be accepted or rejected by parliamentary fiat. Identities are complex, nuanced, and malleable, and many Bosnians continue to negotiate and use them. Some of these are everyday citizens; some of these are legislators. The political parties - known by the acronyms SDA, SDP, and HDZ - are usually at odds with one another. Paraphrasing Coles (2002), difference continues to be reproduced. This is at the heart of the nation's "identity politics."

Bosnia's public education system reflects these realities. Building on both Hromadžić (2011) and Brunwasser (2011), for public schools like those in Vareš this tension is manifest in a simultaneous unification of its administrative/management structure and segregation of its classroom spaces and instruction. This limits what students call *miješanje* (mixing). Combined with a lack of local job prospects, it is no wonder that young people are struggling. Six of those interviewed for this study, at widely separated times, flatly stated that their educational (read: employment) prospects were nil. None of the dozen interviewed stated that they had solid prospects. Yet, the basic curriculum they had been taught held - and still holds - promise. A recent educational and cultural event has been developed called "Vareš ko ljeto" (Vareš summer festival); it took place during August, 2014. Vareš hosted a number of different artists, photographers and filmmakers from the region to display their work for a period of two weeks. The local Radio Bobovac has become the primary local media outlet for news and this has contributed to educational outreach. A youth cultural center, complemented by a potentially viable youth service, is "in the works," with an indefinite completion date. Many of the youth have left to find work elsewhere (especially in Croatia, Austria, Sweden, and other European countries). The meaningful engagement of youth remains among the most consistently stated concerns throughout the 12 years of this study.

Infrastructural improvements clearly are important, and some have been made. Improvements to the high school were noted. Some money has been raised to build new roads and to do small structural renovations. External investments associated with the expansion of sites for the industries noted have been more substantial.

"In Vareš, promises outweigh prospects, and prospects outweigh production." This phrase has become a virtual mantra for the "Little Apple" during the post-civil war period. At the micro-level, what has happened in Vareš is remarkably reflective of what has happened in Bosnia at the macro-level since the war ended in 1995. As the International Crisis Group (2014) points out, the physical scars of the war have healed, but "political agony and ethnic tension persist." Following Barbara Kerewsky-Halpern (1981) who stressed the importance of identity





# The Applied Anthropologist

VAN ARSDALE ET AL.

The Little Apple...

maintenance, and Tone Bringa (1995) who stressed identity transformation, we see both processes at work. Identity maintenance is the *de facto* situation, identity transformation – toward “being Bosnian” – is the *de jure* situation.

Applied anthropological insights are meaningful. The triangulated set of methods we have employed, longitudinally, allow useful interpretive insights to emerge. This is what we believe needs to happen. A greater focus on the intersection of localized socioeconomics and education can work. A point stressed by Stefansson (2004: 176-178) as he collected data on Bosnian war returnees also is central to Vareš: Sustainable livelihoods must be created. The strategic plan which Mayor Kovačević has developed offers a path forward. The jobs being created by firms such as TRD and Balamara Resources Ltd. are encouraging. This initiative must be sustained by a combination of larger-scale external investments, smaller-scale internal investments, and well coordinated canton-level administrative leadership. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), accompanied by tax incentives, is important. The “value-added ladder” must be addressed, so that mid-level investment becomes more attractive and home-grown talent is retained. A degree of political decentralization will help diffuse politicized inter-ethnic relations. A greater focus on established principles of public administration can effectively augment this. The mining industry can be revitalized somewhat, but will not – and should not – come to dominate the Vareš economy as it once did. Sustainable livelihoods will better be created by the sustained development of multiple small-scale industries and touristic endeavors. If wood, stone, and metal products can be exported to other European nations more efficiently, as local leaders stress, Vareš socioeconomic prospects will improve. Continuing to seek “upland inputs” will aid the creative process.

Localized sustainable livelihood strategies, in concert with the investment strategies noted above and realignments of the public education system that better engage youth (many of whom already are well-trained), can trump ethnic divisiveness and identity politics in the “Little Apple.”

## Authors' Statements:

Peter W. Van Arsdale, Ph.D., is Director of African Initiatives at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver, where he also serves (now that he is semi-retired) as an Adjunct Professor. He has worked in a dozen countries world-wide, specializing in community development, human rights, genocide studies, and humanitarian outreach. He is the author or editor of six books and numerous other publications. Among several innovations, he was co-founder of the university's Project Bosnia service learning program. He was the 2002 recipient of the Omer Stewart Award for achievements in applied anthropology. PeterVanArsdale1@gmail.com.

Leslie P. Woodward, M.A., is Co-Founder and Project Director of Bosnia's Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC). She received advanced training in the design of peace-building programs from Romania's Peace Action Training and Research Institute. She also has worked in Kenya, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere in the Balkans. Her work on state-building has impacted programming in Somalia and S. Sudan. Additional specialties include project development, program management, and genocide and post-conflict studies.

Velma Šarić, B.A., is Founder and Executive Director of Bosnia's Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC). Through Sarajevo's School of Science and Technology,

she is a 2015 candidate for an M.A. in conflict analysis and reconciliation. With specialties in genocide studies, human rights, and transitional justice, she has worked as a professional journalist for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, while also covering war crimes cases for the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN). Her film credits include field production for PBS's *Women, War, and Peace* T.V. series.

Woodward and Šarić's “Ordinary Heroes” Project received the first place prize for the 2014 Intercultural Innovation Awards, sponsored by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and the BMW Group. It was presented to them by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The early contributions of Jo Lockwood, Ian Sethre, and Jill Sethre to the work of the University of Denver's service learning program in Vareš were extremely important to its innovations and longevity.

## References

- BiH Census Bureau  
2013 Preliminary Results of the Census in Bosnia and Herzegovina. URL:<[http://www.bhas.ba/obavjestenja/Preliminarni\\_rezultati\\_bos.pdf](http://www.bhas.ba/obavjestenja/Preliminarni_rezultati_bos.pdf)> (August 28, 2013).
- Bringa, Tone  
1995 *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Brunwasser, Matthew  
2011 *Divided in Class and at Play*. International Herald Tribune, July 2/3, p. 2.
- Coles, Kimberley A.  
2002 *Ambivalent Builders: Europeanization, the Production of Difference, and Internationals in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review 25(1):1-18.
- Diegoli, Tommaso  
2007 *Collective Memory and Social Reconstruction in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina* (BiH). Unpublished masters thesis, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver, Denver, Co.
- Embassy of Japan  
2014 Various postings, January-July: Embassy of Japan in Bosnia-Herzegovina. URL:<<http://www.bosnia.emb-japan.go.jp/EN/EconomicPress2014.html>> (January 21, 2014).
- Filandra, Šaćir  
2003 *Bosnia: The Experience of Crisis Management in a Multiethnic Society*. In Stein Kuhnle and Dzemat Sokolović (eds.), *The Balkans: Searching for Solutions*. Conference Proceedings, May 9-12, 2002, pp. 118-121. Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies, Bergen University Research Foundation. Bergen, Norway.
- Halpern, Joel M.  
1967 *A Serbian Village: Social and Cultural Change in a Yugoslav Community* (revised edition, orig. 1956). New York: Harper & Row.
- Hayden, Robert M.  
1996 *Imagined Communities and Real Victims: Self-Determination and Ethnic Cleansing in Yugoslavia*. American Ethnologist 23(4):783-801.
- Hromadžić, Azra  
2011 *Bathroom Mixing: Youth Negotiate Democratization in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina*. PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review 34 (2):268-289.
- International Crisis Group  
2014 *Bosnia's Future*. International Crisis Group – New Report. URL:<<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=7aa3cb2d4e&view>> (October 1, 2014).

# The Applied Anthropologist



VAN ARSDALE ET AL.



The Little Apple...

Kerewsky-Halpern, Barbara  
1981 Text and Context in Ritual Lament. *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 15 (1):52-60.

Kovačević, Avdija  
2013 Project Ideas Catalogue: Vareš Municipality. Mayor's Office, City of Vareš, Bosnia. Available at: <<http://www.vares.info/katalogeng/index.html>>.

Malcolm, Noel  
1996 *Bosnia: A Short History*. Washington Square, NY: New York University Press.

Muftić, Felicia and Michael Muftić  
2014 Rotary Global Grant of \$45,275 to Promote Basic Education for Rural Girls in Bosnia. Unpublished document, Rotary Club of Denver, Denver, Co.

Šarić, Velma  
2014 Bosnia-Herzegovina's Youth Unemployment Rate." Available at: <<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/europe/141008/bosnia-youth-unemployment-rate>>.

Stefansson, Anders H.  
2004 Refugee Returns to Sarajevo and Their Challenge to Contemporary Narratives of Mobility. In Lynell D. Long and Ellen Oxfield (eds.), *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind*. Pp. 170-186. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Van Arsdale, Peter W.  
2008 Learning Applied Anthropology in Field Schools: Lessons from Bosnia and Romania. In Carla Guerrón-Montero (ed.), *Careers in Applied Anthropology: Advice from Academics and Professional Anthropologists*, NAPA Bulletin #29. Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association/Wiley-Blackwell.

## Various Staff On-Line Postings

Staff, eBusiness Services

2013 Bosnian Unemployment Rate: 44.9%. Accessed at: [http://www.rzb.at/eBusiness/services/resources/media/831197035645054749-826100030434411352\\_826101618230137223\\_826102026788901786-860501621044684703-1-1-NA.pdf](http://www.rzb.at/eBusiness/services/resources/media/831197035645054749-826100030434411352_826101618230137223_826102026788901786-860501621044684703-1-1-NA.pdf) (April 26, 2013).

2014 Eastern Mining Begins Geological Work on the Reconstruction of the Mine in Vareš. Accessed at: <http://ekapija.ba/en/Vijest/vijesti/eastern-mining-pocinje-geoloske-radove-na-obnovi-rudnika-u-varesu/35776> (February 12, 2014).

2013 Chinese Businessmen Invest in Wood Processing Plants in Vareš. Accessed at: <http://www.ekapija.ba/en/Vijest/investments/chinese-businessmen-invest-in-wood-processing-plants-in-vares/26554> (June 11, 2013).

Staff, Sarajevo Times

2013a Italians Ready to Invest 10 Million Euros in Factory for Spare Parts, Vareš. *Sarajevo Times*, Aug. 28. Accessed at: <http://www.sarajevotimes.com/italians-ready-to-invest-10-million-euros-in-factory-for-spare-parts-vares/> (August 28, 2013).

2013b Potentials of Vareš Municipality Attracted Austrian Investors. Accessed at: <http://www.sarajevotimes.com/potentials-of-vares-municipality-attracted-austrian-investors/> (April 26, 2013).

Staff, Trading Economics

2012 Bosnian Population and Unemployment Rates. Accessed at: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/bosnia-and-herzegovina/unemployment-rate> (April 26, 2013).

2014 Bosnia and Herzegovina Unemployment Rate. Accessed at: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/bosnia-and-herzegovina/unemployment-rate> (May 10, 2014).



# The Applied Anthropologist

Vol. 35  
No. 2  
2015

LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION AMONG THE CH'ORTI'S (MAYAS)

ROBIN QUIZAR

## ABSTRACT

Because of the pressures of the modern world, language revitalization among speakers of a rapidly-dying language must be multi-disciplinary in order to be effective. Surrounded by Spanish speakers, the approximately 22,000 Ch'orti' (Maya) of eastern Guatemala must learn Spanish, and have varying opinions about attempts to maintain their native language. Nevertheless, there are extensive efforts designed to revitalize the language and preserve the culture. Community members in Jocotán are building an interactive museum to showcase Ch'orti' culture and language and their historical connection with the Classic Maya. They are thinking about the impact of tourism and want to create an effective bilingual school for local children. The Ch'orti' Project, established by Robin Quizar and supported by the Ethnography Lab on the MSU Denver campus, is collaborating with the *Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala* (ALMG) to take old texts and stories recorded in the 1930s and 1960s and transcribe them into the modern Ch'orti' alphabet for use in bilingual classrooms and in the proposed Ch'orti' museum. The Project also hopes to participate in the creation of the museum and in the planning for future tourism to the area and is working to establish various types of language schools for teaching Ch'orti'.

**KEY WORDS:** language revitalization, Mayan, sociolinguistics, multi-disciplinary approach

## Language Situation among the Ch'orti's

Ch'orti' is a Mayan language spoken in eastern Guatemala near the Honduran border. According to official census data, there are about 47,000 ethnic Ch'orti's living in Guatemala and over 4000 in Honduras, and in the year 2000 about 30,000 Ch'orti's reportedly spoke their native language, mostly in and around Jocotán. The number of speakers is unclear because many people do not admit to their knowledge of Ch'orti' out of shame, or even because of the danger of identifying themselves as indigenous.

After the signing of the peace accords in Guatemala in 1996, the government agreed to provide bilingual education in primary schools, but the goal has always been to help the children learn Spanish more quickly, and not to preserve the Ch'orti' language. In fact, most of the so-called "bilingual" teachers are ethnic Ch'orti's who cannot speak the language, but who have learned the alphabet and can teach the letters and sounds of each letter to the children. Except for the most basic lessons in literacy, the schools do not have materials for learning how to read, write, or speak Ch'orti'.

Although there is a certain nostalgia about speaking Ch'orti', most adults do not value their language. Parents often insist on speaking only Spanish to their children, under the conviction that this will help them succeed better in school. Ethnic Ch'orti's have little knowledge of recent research showing strong Ch'orti' connections to the Classic Mayan civilization of the past and do not realize how these new discoveries might influence the lives of their children, including the potential impact on the community of tourists and researchers who might want to study about the Ch'orti' language and culture.

## Ch'orti' Language Revitalization

The earliest attempts to document and analyze the language were the Spanish priests who wanted to teach Catholicism to the natives. Ch'olti', the probable ancestor to Ch'orti', was documented by Morán in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, who chronicled religious texts as well as a grammatical description and a vocabulary of the language (for more information, see Robertson, Law, and Haertel 2010; and Sattler 2004). In the 1930s, Charles Wisdom lived among the Ch'orti's and wrote an extensive ethnography of the Ch'orti' culture which was published in 1940. His notes on the language, both texts and grammar, were never published but are available to the public on microfilm (Wisdom 1950). A Quaker missionary in the 1930s and 1940s, Ines Oakley, studied the language and did some Bible translations in order to make religious teachings more accessible to Ch'orti' speakers. John Fought worked in the Jocotán area in the 1960s, publishing a book with a grammatical description of Ch'orti' plus forty texts in the language on various topics, such as animal fables, religion, home life, worldview, and agriculture (1972). Starting in the 1970s, John Lubeck of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, settled in Jocotán to translate the Bible. He has published a number of religious documents and a pedagogical grammar (the latter with Diane Cowie 1989) and in addition, has focused on teaching the Ch'orti's to read their own language. A number of linguists-anthropologists, including myself, have recorded texts, collected data, and compiled wordlists in Ch'orti' to help preserve the language. Some of this more recent work is published, and even more of it is contained only in the archives of individual linguists or in that of institutions, such as The Smith-



# The Applied Anthropologist



## QUIZAR

## Language Revitalization...

sonian, the University of Texas, Tulane University, and Brigham Young University.

The first real attempt to teach the Ch'orti's about the structure of their own language, so that they could work on it themselves, arose through the efforts of the *Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín* (PLFM). PLFM, housed in Huehuetenango and in Antigua, Guatemala, focused on numerous Mayan languages in Guatemala, hiring linguists to work on specific languages. I participated in this project 1975-79 and worked with a team of Ch'orti' speakers. I taught them the kind of practical linguistics necessary to enable them to write their own dictionaries, grammars, and stories (the PLFM Ch'orti' dictionary was published in 1996, the grammar in 1994, and a set of stories in 1996). The newly-trained Ch'orti' linguists then used these materials in teaching other Ch'orti's to read and write their language. These initial efforts were successful in that a few young Ch'orti' speakers went on to study linguistics at the university and now have elevated positions in the bilingual education programs that exist in Jocotán. Unfortunately, many of the so-called "bilingual" teachers that work under these indigenous specialists do not know enough Ch'orti' to do much more than give their elementary students the basics of literacy in the language.

Following the 1996 Peace Accords, the Guatemalan government agreed to support the *Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala* (Academia or ALMG), a language revitalization effort formed in the late 1980s and designed to serve all the indigenous languages in the country. Inspired by the work of the earlier PLFM, the Academia was likewise established to help train native speakers in linguistics and to publish written materials in their specific Mayan language. At their inception, the Academia voted on a standard alphabet to be used for all languages in Guatemala, a very significant step. Up to this time, Ch'orti' materials had been written in various writing systems, making it difficult for speakers to use. Since the chosen alphabet was virtually the same as that used by the PLFM, the Academia could now easily teach the Ch'orti's to use the older materials of the PLFM and continue to publish new books without further training. Although the Guatemalan government has significantly lowered its financial support of the Academia in recent years, the local Ch'orti' group in Jocotán still struggles along. Publication of books is at a halt, but cooperation with teacher training in basic Ch'orti' continues. A problem now facing the Academia and the community in general is that many children are coming to school with only a limited knowledge of Ch'orti'. Their parents are speaking Spanish to them at home to help them succeed in school. These same children are hired as "bilingual teachers" when they graduate because they can pass simple tests in Ch'orti'. However, they are not truly comfortable speaking and writing the language.

The Ch'orti' Project, which I established under the sponsorship of Rebecca Forgash in the Ethnography Lab at the Metropolitan State University of Denver in 2013, is designed to continue the revitalization of the Ch'orti' language through linguistic training and publication of native works and reverse the trend toward indigenous language loss in children. In addition to col-

laborating with the Academia to help develop materials in the Ch'orti' language for use in the schools and in the community, we are searching for innovative ways to promote the language in the newly-proposed Ch'orti' museum in Jocotán.

### The Ch'orti' Project

Our initial endeavor has involved MSUDenver students in the lab who have helped me digitize and transliterate two groups of older Ch'orti' texts into the modern alphabet. The texts were originally recorded in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one by Charles Wisdom in the 1930s and the other by John Fought in the 1960s. We formally presented the reformatted texts to the Academia and to the Ch'orti' community in the fall of 2014. The students and I are also conducting linguistics research on the digitized texts in the Ethnography Lab.

The texts and grammatical notes from Charles Wisdom — Ch'orti' ethnographer and linguist in the 1930s — contain some 180 handwritten pages with word-for-word English translation of texts about daily life and Ch'orti' culture. Wisdom used a phonetic script but not the same one as the modern standard alphabet. I bought a microfilm copy of Wisdom's notes in the late 1970s or early 1980s from the University of Chicago, and they have languished in my basement until 2013 when I again began working on Ch'orti'. I recently discovered that many linguists and anthropologists were unaware of these unpublished grammatical notes and texts from Wisdom (microfilm 1950).

John Fought, Ch'orti' linguist and anthropologist recorded numerous texts told to him by Isidro Gonzales in the 1960s. Fought's publication in 1972 provided 40 texts on various topics, including religion, daily life, worldview, and fables about animals and nature. He wrote free translations into English at the end of each text. His phonetic script, different from that of Wisdom, was also not the same as the modern standard Ch'orti' alphabet.

In the Ethnography Lab, work-study students and interns did all the initial work on the texts, digitizing them, substituting the phonetic symbols used by Wisdom and Fought with the corresponding symbols from the current standard alphabet, and eliminating extraneous markings. I then went carefully through the texts, editing the results of the digitization process to ensure their accuracy and regularizing the spelling so that modern Ch'orti' readers could understand them. In addition, I gave word-for-word English translations for all the texts so that the students in the lab could be involved in the analysis of the texts, as well as for research use by other linguists and anthropologists. The Ch'orti', of course, do not need or want English translations, but they may be interested in providing Spanish translations for the texts in the future. In order to make Wisdom's handwritten texts more accessible for future research purposes, Randa Marhenke is working on a typed digitized copy of the original handwritten text, with copious notes on erasures, strike-outs, and other markings from Wisdom's fieldwork.



## Ch'orti' Workshop in Jocotán

I arranged with the *Academia* to have a Ch'orti' Workshop in Jocotán in October of 2014. Rebecca Forgash accompanied me, taking photos of the event and meeting the other participants in anticipation of taking a more central role in the project herself. The primary goal of the workshop was to present to the *Academia* the digitized texts that were finished at the time (all the Wisdom texts and 28 out of the 40 Fought texts) and to discuss together what to do with them. I used this forum for other purposes, as well. I presented the *Academia* with two used laptops provided by MSUDenver's Information Technology Department for the promotion of Ch'orti' literacy (these were 2 of the 5 laptops total that MSUDenver has donated for our project). I also talked about the important relationship between the current Ch'orti' language and the Classic Mayan hieroglyphs, particularly in Copán. Estuardo Vásquez, a non-Ch'orti' merchant in the community, and Jorge Nolasco, a member of *Comunidad Man*, an official development coordination agency, presented their proposal for a future Ch'orti' museum in the town of Jocotán (the museum proposal was inspired by Brent Metz, an anthropologist at the University of Kansas who has worked with the Ch'orti's since 1990).

The Ch'orti' Workshop was arranged by the *Academia* to be held starting at 8:00am and extending through the lunch hour on a Saturday in October 2014 at the Hotel Ramírez in the center of Jocotán. Not surprisingly, only 4-5 people actually showed up at 8:00am, but eventually 62 people arrived, mostly indigenous teachers and student teachers from nearby communities. I had only brought 30 handouts of a few representative stories, so everyone ended up sharing. We focused our attention on Fought's text "The Hawk and the Toad". Individual participants read the story out loud. Some of them knew how to pronounce the sounds but didn't know what the words meant, while others were fluent speakers of Ch'orti' and understood the text. Everyone laughed at the stammered out-loud readings, as well as the humor of the story. There was a lively group discussion about what to do with the digitized narratives, since teachers have varying competencies in the language. The so-called "bilingual" teachers all have at least a vague knowledge of the pronunciation the sounds of the alphabet, but only a few of them actually speak Ch'orti'. Their young students often know more of the language than they do. The discussion revealed that the teachers who spoke Ch'orti' did not want to distribute the stories with Spanish translations, while the teachers with lower competency in the language wanted translations with each text. The fact that the narratives are digitized, however, easily allows for either type of distribution, with or without translations.

Both Estuardo Vásquez and Jorge Nolasco spoke at the workshop about their respective contributions to the museum project. Estuardo Vásquez has contributed the site on the highway at the entrance to Jocotán and will construct the building on the cement flooring where his family once processed the coffee from the family plantation. Because Estuardo is not Ch'orti' himself, he felt it necessary to stress that his *ladino* family had al-

ways tried to maintain good relations with the indigenous population; his grandfather had invited his Ch'orti' workers and their families to an annual fiesta to thank them for their labor. Jorge Nolasco is working on relationships between the museum and the Jocotán community as well as connections with the museum at the site of Copán across the border in Honduras. He discussed issues about the Ch'orti's gaining some control over the running of the museums, as well as the presentation of the indigenous past and present culture. Jorge also stressed that Brent Metz of the University of Kansas initiated the museum project and should remain a prominent participant in its future development.

After the workshop, Estuardo invited Rebecca and me to the restaurant he has already built on the museum site. I had eaten there on previous visits, but Estuardo and his sisters wanted Rebecca to experience it, as well. In the restaurant they serve dishes that are native to the area — a mixture of Spanish and Ch'orti' customs. On the grounds surrounding the restaurant are plants that provide the spices and herbs for the meals. (I should mention that everyday Ch'orti' food is very simple, consisting of mostly of tortillas, black beans, and chicken soup.) Estuardo showed us the cement flooring that will provide the basis for the museum and spoke about a huge thatched roof to be built over it. He demonstrated how they planned to have moveable walls for the museum, making the exhibits flexible and easily stored. There is considerable talk about making the museum "interactive." Brent Metz hopes to provide a venue for Ch'orti's to promote their culture with each other: sharing recipes, music, folklore, and history. Others want to make the museum "interactive" in the sense that visitors can hear the language and watch Ch'orti's making crafts on the museum site. The Ch'orti' Project on the MSUDenver campus is working with Estuardo's sisters, Samara and Mayary, to develop a bibliography and an electronic library so that the museum becomes a center for research on the Maya. Rebecca Forgash hopes to develop the museum narrative so that it will show the historical connection to the Classic Maya. Her visit to the various museums at Copán revealed that the exhibits never mention the Ch'orti' language or people, although it has become increasingly obvious in recent years that ancestors of the Ch'orti' were fully involved in Copán as the elite class who were writing the hieroglyphs.

## Ch'orti' Past and Present

One of the significant aspects of our Ch'orti' Project is establishing the linguistic and cultural heritage of the present-day Ch'orti' people. One reason for doing this is to inspire all ethnic Ch'orti's to help preserve their language, and another is to update the museum narratives in Copán and elsewhere, including in the proposed museum at Jocotán to describe the connection between the Ch'orti's and their ancient and historical past.

Epigraphers and linguists have been claiming since the 1970s that the basis for the Classic Mayan hieroglyphs, 300-900 AD, was a Ch'olan language (see Kaufman and Justeson 2009, p.228). Previously, it was assumed that Yukatek Maya was the language behind the glyphs because the Spanish con-



querors had discovered and burned codices written by Yukatek speakers; it is now thought that Yukatek speakers later adapted the glyphs for use in writing their own language during the Post Classic Maya period, or 900-1521 AD (Becquey 2014, p.38). Glottochronology and some variability in the inscriptions across the Classic Maya area has led many researchers to claim that the Ch'olan branch of languages was a single language (with dialectal variation) during the Classic period, and this Proto-Ch'olan language was the basis for the glyphs (see Mora-Marín 2009; Mora-Marín, Hopkins, and Josserand 2009; and Wichmann 2004).

Contrastive evidence suggests that the Cholan languages had split up into separate languages by the time the Classic Maya were writing the glyphs, and that Eastern Cholan (Ch'orti' and the now-extinct Ch'olti') served as the basis for the hieroglyphic writing of the Classic Maya site of Copán, as well as other southeastern sites from the same period (see Houston, Robertson, and Stuart 2000). Although the epigrapher-linguist Alfonso Lacadena states that Western Ch'olan was probably represented in the glyphs in the northwestern part of the Classic area (personal communication, Wayeb conference 2014), others are of the opinion that the entire Classic area had hieroglyphs written in Eastern Ch'olan, or as they put it, Classic Ch'olti'ian (Law, Robertson, Houston, and Haertel 2009). The controversy thus still rages as to whether Ch'olan was still a single language when the glyphs were written or whether Ch'olan had already split into two branches by Classic Maya times, the Eastern Ch'olan branch being the basis for the glyphs. Either way, Ch'orti' was involved — because it is both a Ch'olan language and an Eastern Cholan language.

A related controversy has to do with the relationship between the two languages of the Eastern Ch'olan branch: Ch'orti' and the now-extinct Ch'olti'. Starting with the claim by linguists Terrance Kaufman and William Norman (1984, pp.80-83) that Ch'orti' and the now-extinct Ch'olti' were sister languages and thus separate languages, many traditional Mayanists (see Campbell and Kaufman 1985, p.188; Wichmann 2002; and Mora-Marín 2009) have operated under or argued for this assumption. Subsequent linguists have challenged this assertion, saying instead that Ch'orti' is the direct descendant of Ch'olti' (or a very close dialect) and that the languages are thus two historical stages of a single language (Robertson 1998; Robertson and Law 2009). My own recent linguistics research supports this latter claim. If the two are indeed in an ancestor-descendant relationship, statements about the ancestor of Ch'olti' would also be true of the ancestor of Ch'orti'.

As linguists and epigraphers continue their research, these controversies will likely become settled one way or the other. This is significant to our revitalization work in two ways. We hope to use the connection between the modern-day language and the ancient inscriptions — whatever this turns out to be — as a motivational factor to inspire speakers to pass their language down to their children and to learn the Ch'orti' language even as non-native speakers. Our assumption is that, when the ancient past is more fully understood by greater numbers of

people, tourism in the area will increase, and those Ch'orti's who speak the language fluently will be at an advantage for jobs in education and in the tourist industry.

Resolving the controversies will also be significant to the creation of a more accurate and positive representation of the Ch'orti' heritage in the proposed Ch'orti' museum. Even if the issues do not become fully resolved in the near future, there are more accurate ways to present the museum narratives as research-in-progress. The recent Maya exhibit at the Denver Museum (2014), for example, had a valuable presentation about how the hieroglyphs were written and the history of their decipherment. However, there was no mention of the Ch'olan languages on which the hieroglyphs were based or the present-day speakers of descendants of those languages. Instead, the Classic Maya glyphs were presented with Yukatek words and their English translations (Yukatek inscriptions written in Post-Classic and Pre-Colonial times were an adaptation of earlier Ch'olan Classic Mayan inscriptions). The various museums in Copán similarly ignore mentioning by name the Ch'orti' and all other Ch'olan languages in their narratives of the Classic Mayan inscriptions. Recent archaeological research suggests that the situation at Copán was complicated, with Ch'orti' Maya speakers writing the inscriptions as the elite class, and perhaps ethnic Lenca (Lenca speakers?) living as peasants surrounding the site.

## Language Revitalization among the Ch'orti's

In conclusion, the Ch'orti' Project to revitalize the language is an interdisciplinary research endeavor. We are working together with the local community of Ch'orti' speakers and ethnic Ch'orti's, starting from Jocotán and extending as far as necessary into Honduras and elsewhere. Future projects include the following: a bilingual school (dual language school) promoting and developing the use of the Ch'orti' language in addition to Spanish; a local school for teaching Ch'orti' and Spanish to outsiders (as a money-making project and to promote research and responsible tourism); teacher training in the Ch'orti' language, as well as in reading/writing the hieroglyphs; and teaching the Ch'orti's about their distinguished past.

## Notes

1. *XI Censo Nacional de Población y VI de Habitación (Censo 2002) - Pertenencia de grupo étnico* cited in Wikipedia, <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ch%27orti%27\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ch%27orti%27_people)>, accessed December 7, 2015.
2. Ch'orti' at Ethnologue, 18<sup>th</sup> ed. 2015 (from J. Lubeck 2000), <<http://www.ethnologue.com/country/GT/languages>>, accessed December 7, 2015.
3. Some of these have been Cédric Becquey, Kerry Hull, Vitalino Pérez Martínez, Otto Schumann, Brian Stross, Søren Wichmann, as well as researchers at PLFM and ALMG.

## References

*XI Censo Nacional de Población y VI de Habitación*  
2002 *Pertenencia de grupo étnico* cited in Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ch%27orti%27\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ch%27orti%27_people), accessed December 7, 2015.

Becquey, C.

2014 *Diasystème, diachronie: Études comparées dans les langues cholanes*. Amsterdam: LOT, Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics.





## QUIZAR



## Language Revitalization...

Campbell, L., and T. Kaufman.  
1985 Mayan linguistics: Where are we now? *Annual Review of Anthropology* 14:187–198.

Feldman, L.H.  
1998 *Motagua colonial: Conquest and colonization in the Motagua River Valley of Guatemala*. Raleigh, NC: Boson Books [electronic publication].

Fought, J. G.  
1972 *Chorti (Mayan) texts (I)*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Houston, S., J. Robertson, and D. Stuart  
2000 The language of Classic Maya inscriptions. *Current Anthropology* 41 (3):321–356.

Kaufman, T., and J. Justeson  
2009 Historical linguistics and pre-Colombian Mesoamerica. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 20:221–231.

Kaufman, T., and W.M. Norman  
1984 An outline of Proto-Cholan phonology, morphology, and vocabulary. In J. S. Justeson & L. Campbell (Eds.), *Phoneticism in Mayan hieroglyphic writing* No. 9, pp. 77–166. Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, SUNY Albany.

Law, D., J. Robertson, S. Houston, and R. Haertel.  
2009 Most Maya glyphs are written in Ch'olti'an. In Metz, B.E., C.L. McNeil, and K.M. Hull, eds. *The Ch'orti' Maya Area: Past and Present*, pp.29–42.

Lewis, M. Paul, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, eds.  
2015 *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 18<sup>th</sup> ed. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. <http://www.ethnologue.com/country/GT/languages>, accessed December 7, 2015.

Lubeck, J. E., and D. L. Cowie  
1989 *Método modern para aprender el idioma Chortí: Una gramática pedagógica*. Guatemala: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano (SIL).

Metz, B. E.  
2006 *Ch'orti'-Maya survival in Eastern Guatemala: Indigeneity in transition*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

Metz, B. E., C. L. McNeil, and K. M. Hull. (Eds.)  
2009 *The Ch'orti' Maya area: Past and present*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.

Mora-Marín, D.  
2009 A test and falsification of the 'Classic Ch'olti'an' hypothesis: A study of three Proto-Ch'olan markers. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 75 (2):115–157.

Mora-Marín, D., N. Hopkins, and K. Josserand  
2009 The linguistic affiliation of Classic Lowland Mayan writing and the historical sociolinguistic geography of the Mayan lowlands. In Metz, B.E., C.L. McNeil, and K.M. Hull, eds. *The Ch'orti' Maya Area: Past and Present*, pp.15–28.

Pérez Martínez, V.  
1994 *Gramática del idioma Ch'orti'*. Antigua, Guatemala: Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín.  
1996 *Leyenda Maya Ch'orti'*. Guatemala: Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín.

Pérez Martínez, V. et al. (Authors), and R. Quizar (Ed.)  
1996 *Diccionario del idioma Ch'orti'* (bilingual Spanish-Mayan dictionary). Antigua, Guatemala: Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín.

Quizar, R.  
1994 Split ergativity and word order in Ch'orti'. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 60(2):120–138.

Quizar, R., and S. Knowles-Berry  
1988 Ergativity in the Cholan languages. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 54(1):73–95.

Robertson, J. S.  
1998 A Ch'olti'an explanation for Ch'orti'an grammar; A postlude to the language of the Classic Maya. *Mayab* 11. UNAM: Sociedad Española de Estudios Mayas.

Robertson, J. S., and D. Law.  
2009 Valency to aspect in the Ch'olan-Tzeltalan family of Mayan. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 75(3):293–316.

Robertson, J. S., D. Law, and R.A. Haertel  
2010 *Colonial Ch'olti': The seventeenth-century Morán manuscript*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Sattler, M.  
2004 An analysis of the *Arte de la lengua Ch'olti'* by Fray Francisco Morán. In Wichmann, S., ed. *The Linguistics of Maya Writing*, pp.365–405.

Wichmann, S.  
2002 Hieroglyphic evidence for the historical configuration of Eastern Ch'olan. *Research Reports on Ancient Maya Writing* 51:1–35.

Wichmann, S., ed.  
2004 *The Linguistics of Maya Writing*. Salt Lake: University of Utah Press.

Wisdom, C.  
1940 *The Chorti Indians of Guatemala*. University of Chicago Press.  
1950 *Materials on the Chorti language*. University of Chicago Microfilm Collection.



# The Applied Anthropologist

Vol. 35  
No. 2  
2015

CULTURAL RITUALS: HEALING FROM AN  
INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE

RAMON DEL CASTILLO

## ABSTRACT

This paper, utilizing qualitative research referred to as the Topical Life History approach cited by Norman Denzin (1972), describes some of the healing practices used by a *curandera* in a western psychiatric system. The art and science of *curanderismo* is a holistic approach to healing that includes physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual work, the latter being something that is generally omitted in western psychiatry. Diana Velazquez, interviewed for this research while she worked under the auspices of a formal mental health clinic in Denver, Colorado, was selected because of her uniqueness, namely her formal status as a *curandera*, within a community mental health center. The essay discusses the healing methods, rites and rituals utilized when an indigenous healing system on the verge of being institutionalized is introduced and gains legitimacy within an existing dominant psychiatric paradigm.

The author utilized the topical life history approach in conducting the interviews with *curanderas/os* in this research. Norman Denzin assumes that in researching life histories human conduct will be studied and understood from the perspective of the persons involved. He states, "Clearly this is a case for taking the role of the acting other and actively sharing in his/her experiences and perspectives" (Denzin, 1970, p. 220). With other authors, Denzin (1978) essentially argues that throughout the course of one's daily life, people make sense of the world around them and give meaning to it. The function of the researcher is to document life information relating to the perspectives elicited from the interviewee, with all of its associated meanings that are integral parts of the individual's social relationships. Denzin argues that life histories are viable because they allow for the interviewees to define their own experiences (Denzin, 1970). Life histories allow for the individuals being interviewed, through self-definition to tell their own stories. Cultural identity in relationship to life histories is a significant factor within self-definition. With persons of color, it allows for a cultural perspective to emerge, which was an important aspect of this research.

## DIANA VELAZQUEZ

For some *curanderos/as* the process of becoming a *curandero/a* begins with a revelation, a vision or a dream (Foster, 1953; Madsen, 1964; Romano, 1965). Diana Guevara Velazquez's role in life began with the sound of her crying in the womb. Witnessed by family and community members, this was an Indigenous Mexican cultural sign that another healer was coming to life. Dr. James Jaramillo writes, "Legend has it that if a child cries in the womb, she will be given the *don* (gift) and become a *curandera*" (Perrone, et. al. 1989, p. 92).

Velazquez was born in Lockhart, Texas on March 11, 1939. Her Texas/Mexican childhood was not typical compared to the socialization processes defined by American society. She began training to enhance her *don* (gift) at an early age, accompanying her Grandmother Chona, who was a respected healer, throughout the community, sometimes being carried in an old orange crate; she was present at many of the cultural healing rituals that were performed. Velazquez began practicing *curanderismo* herself at the age of eight. Within her abilities and through the counseling, mentoring and guidance of her grandmother, she began to perform healing rituals with *barrio* women.

I started practicing when I was eight. My grandmother, when I was eight, would say, so and so is sick, that is what is wrong with her. Get what you

need and go take care of them. As a child, it did not occur to me to say, "Well, what if I don't know, what if I fail? I've never done this before." I went. I picked up what I needed: the herbs, the eggs, the lemon, the charcoal, and I went and said, "Chona told me to come." They said okay, and I did what I was supposed to do. I went back home, didn't report to anybody or was never asked how did it go. I assumed that lady was going to get well. I did everything I was supposed to. And she did get well.

Don Herman "Chito" Velazquez was a Yaqui Indian and well known *curandero* in Sonora, Mexico. Cecilio, the eldest son, had been sent on a mission by his father to find another healer to join the family. The Velazquez clan from Sonora, Mexico, had a family tradition of *curanderismo*; however, a generation had passed, and there were no signs that a healer existed among that particular generation. It was Cecilio's cultural duty to find a *curandera* who would become part of their family and continue the cycle of *curanderismo*. Through a traditional marriage contract, Diana Velazquez was promised in marriage to Cecilio Velazquez at the young age of 12. Diana Velazquez still defines her marriage as a "marriage of convenience."

Velazquez was married at the age of 15 to Cecilio. They moved to Sonora, where she was embraced and mentored by

# The Applied Anthropologist

DEL CASTILLO

Cultural Rituals...

Don Chito. While in the Yaqui Indian village, she played the roles of *partera* (midwife) and nurse. Here she encountered a general practitioner from the community, who also mentored her while simultaneously allowing her to treat Indigenous patients. Over the next several years, Velazquez delivered 612 newborn babies, and treated pregnant mothers before and after delivery.

The teachings of Don Chito were full of the philosophy of *curanderismo*, with its inherent traditions passed down from Yaqui ancestors who had lived in Mexico for many generations. He became her mentor, friend and ally, not merely her father-in-law. His lessons were designed to enhance the development of Velazquez's power as a healer, and she describes her mentorship as one full of rituals with significant cultural meaning, common sense, and life lessons. She recalls:

I had asked [Don Chito] for a solution to a problem ...He asked me to bring him seven pieces of wood that had to be a certain size. And then, he had me place the logs on the ground and start a fire ...so I made the fire along with a lot of tears ...the fire started ...he asked me to go out and bring in a piece of branch, it was called *pirul*. It had to be a certain length and it had to be flexible. I went out and he handed me the branch and he had left. And he asked me to look for the solution to the problem I had. After sorting through the amber and the ashes, it finally came to me ...So he said, "What is the solution to the problem?" And he said, "Did you find the solution in the amber or the fire?" "No," I said. "Was it in the ashes or in the stick?" "No," I said. So I pointed to my head and heart and said that is where the answer is at. "Ah," he said. That was his highest compliment ...He was teaching me that I did not need a crystal ball, I didn't need anything to find the solutions. That I had to trust what I already knew, that I had to trust, that I had to trust myself.

In 1962 the family returned to San Antonio, Texas, where Velazquez continued her practice as a *curandera*. Until the age of 35, she practiced *curanderismo* in a very traditional sense, working with other *curanderos/as* in an underground networking system. *Curanderismo* had not been accepted by the American Medical Association; therefore its practice was confined to Mexican *barrios*, and clients were referred by word of mouth.

Velazquez earned her "credentials" when the community acclaimed her skilled, effective healing practices. Essentially, the credentials earned by a *curandero/a* come from his/her reputation in the community and an informal training curriculum learned in its' sociocultural subsystem. A *curandera's* reputation flourishes as the result of actual work accomplished, in contrast to modern society where one cannot inherit the right to practice medicine, but must first certify theoretical competence (Kurts and Chalfant, 1984, p. 144).

In 1972 Velazquez moved again, this time to Denver, Colorado. In 1973, things changed for her when she was clinically

diagnosed with cancer and depression. She decided to seek out therapy, paradoxically from a modern psychiatric counseling center. This was her first encounter with *Centro de las Familias*, a specialty clinic under the auspices of Southwest Denver Community Mental Health Center. This clinic was a derivative of the deinstitutionalization movement at a time when there was no prescription for community mental health centers, and it therefore was ostensibly prepared for radical innovation. Velazquez was displeased with the lack of compassion shown and the sterile ambience of the clinic. She believes that this frustration was meant to happen.

At the time of her admission to the clinic, the psychiatric team was looking for a secretary. Through a bit of persuasion, Velazquez applied for the job and became a part of the staff. It was during a psychiatric case consultation that the team leader, Dr. Ernesto Alvarado, inquired about her abilities as a healer. According to Velazquez,

The team was staffing families that had been admitted into the clinic. This was considered general supervision. In one particular case, feedback about intervention mental health strategies was given to the assigned mental health therapist. My role was to take notes. However, I felt compelled to intervene.

When Velazquez finished her clinical assessment, the team leader asked her how she knew what to do. She replied, "I am a *curandera*. I have been working with our people for a long time."

Velazquez feels that this admission was part of the path to her final destination. During this time and because of the relative newness of community mental health centers in the mental health field, there were government funds available for creative and innovative mental health programs, and Alvarado applied for funds to implement *curanderismo* as a specialized mental health treatment modality. Following a training regimen in modern psychiatry, Velazquez was able to grasp many of the concepts of community mental health that were already a part of her Indigenous/Mexican/Chicano cultural perspective. She eventually was able to blend the two into a well-rounded approach to healing without losing her efficacy. Syncretism is present during the amalgamation of different cultural systems. Fear is always present as the two systems interact with each other wherein one overpowers the other. However, Diana was wise and skilled enough to tread through this and remain true to the knowledge that she possessed and how to blend the two fields of healing. In the field of counseling, *curanderismo* is often referred to as *ethnopsychiatry*.

Velazquez began to practice *curanderismo* at *Centro de las Familias*. Through word of mouth, the community came to know of her presence. She recalls one of her most vivid experiences with what she terms a hexed client:

The staff at the children's ward ...asked me if I would be willing to come ...and I said ...well sure but I would have to get the appropriate permission. So I talked to Dr. Paul Polak, and he made arrangements with the head of the children's division



at the time ...so when I went in, they were expecting me, but they didn't know what to expect ...they were used to [what happens] when a consultant comes in, which is to sit down and go over the case history with the consultant. So I did that and I listened to it all and all the different presentations. And then, I finally got to see the child. And I said hello to her and I asked her if she knew who I was. I thought maybe they had told her they were bringing a *curandera*. And she said, "No, I don't know who you are. But somehow I feel that you are the one that is going to help me." So I figured I'm half-way home. And I asked for a room that I could work with her and right away they wanted to videotape it and all that stuff. And I said no, that I did not approve of that, that this was something that was sacred and so they said okay. So I went in there and entered the room ...I had a set of beads, they are round like sunburst and they have like three different kinds of heads and seeds ...It's almost like a condenser, that the right energy would flow to her as opposed to an adult. So I took the beads and swept her with them, and we prayed the Our Father, which she was familiar with, and I prayed the way I do. And then we had finished the prayer; I said to her, "Now I want you to move this finger," pointing to the index, and very slowly she did it. And I said "Now I want you to move your other fingers," and she did. "So now let's move your whole hand," and she opened both hands and she was able to extend them. And that took about 25 minutes. So I wheeled her out and the doctors said "Is there anything that you are going to be able to tell us about her so that we can help her? Is there anything you are going to be able to do to help us?" And I said, "Well, I think so." And I said, "Lisa, would you shake hands with your doctor?" So she extended her hands ...and then she waved with the other one.

Velazquez states that this was her "first miracle." The professional staff had mixed emotions about the experience: some were in awe, others were in doubt, and some were even angry. Nevertheless, word that a healer had performed a miracle permeated the local psychiatric community. There was an influx of calls from the Denver Chicano community requesting services. The word spread regionally, then nationally. What was fascinating was the penetration of another method of healing into the field of western psychiatry that many viewed as antithetical.

## Cultural Diagnostics and Treatment Methods

Velazquez utilizes cultural diagnostics in order to determine her client's disorders and/or needs. This provides the basis for building an effective treatment plan suited for each individual. There are several types of cultural diagnostics that Velazquez

treats. One example is *trisia*, which she defines "as a *tristeza* [depression] that goes not only from the body but into your soul." It appears that this particular diagnosis describes categorically what western psychologists or psychiatrists call depression or perhaps melancholia, except that it manifests itself in the spirit and the soul as well. Beyond the textbook definition, Velazquez adds,

...*trisia* means that down to the very core of your soul there is this sadness ...this deep depression. So I also see people with this. The other thing that I see is a lot of men who carry a lot of guilt and are exhibiting it through bad luck or illness that they can't diagnose. Guilt such as having killed somebody, having incested [sic] their daughter or sister, and even guilt of having come to the United States from Mexico, promising to support their mothers and fathers, and not following through whether it's because they can't afford it or it's because they have given money to women or whomever it is ...they have that feeling. So they come in exhibiting symptoms of what you might call a hex.

Velazquez treats men with these types of psychological and spiritual problems by the use of cultural rituals, prayer and empowerment. She believes that she is a vessel, given power to heal by God: power used to transmit energy and healing back into her clients. Her techniques are culturally specific, and laden with the values that Chicanos and Mexicanos carry as part of their cultures. In many cases, cultural conflict based on values inherent between two social systems causes anxiety and confusion that manifests itself in various emotional responses such as depression, guilt and anger.

Velazquez's insight and ability to "know" her clients is a factor that helps to move through the core of ambiguity to diagnosis and treatment of the client. She uses a direct approach in dealing with clients, which places her in a position of respect with them. Psychologically, she uses a blend of common sense and various methods that are culturally responsive.

Another example of cultural diagnostics is *mal de ojo*, or evil eye, a common occurrence in the Mexican-American community, generally associated with children and believed to have a supernatural or magical origin (Madsen, 1964a; Kiev, 1968; Rubel, 1960). Certain people are believed to possess "a very strong or hot vision capable of harming another person. If a person with this powerful vision happens to desire or admire a person for any reason, a supernatural force is projected onto that person who then becomes ill" (Lucero, 1981, p. 36). Noted researchers such as Ari Kiev suggest that *mal de ojo* "is an expression of guilt and anxiety being projected onto another person (usually a stranger)" (Kiev, 1968, p. 1067). Treatment for *mal de ojo* is diagnosis, followed by a simple touch by the person projecting the energy.

Velazquez describes her practice as holistic medicine. She believes that everything that is used for healing is God given, including modern physicians, nurses, and other types of healers.

# The Applied Anthropologist

DEL CASTILLO

Cultural Rituals...

There is never any hesitancy to refer clients to doctors when Velazquez feels that she is unable to do a patient any good, or when, in fact, that patient has a particular disease that she cannot treat. At times, Velazquez will even design rituals that act as incentives for clients to seek out treatment from their physicians. As a holistic healer, Velazquez deals with the spiritual aspect of a person which is not general practice used by psychiatrists in this country. Generally, western psychiatric healers do not believe in treating the spirit, which is left for persons of the cloth or treated through anti-psychotic medication. Therefore she is often seen as a spiritual healer. On many occasions, religious figures from various denominations contacted her because someone in their particular parish was *embrujado/a* (bewitched). Velazquez responds by doing consultative services via the community mental health center. She builds relationships with psychologists and psychiatrists through the use of this process, knowing that there is a level of trust and respect that needs to be established with western healers. Because of the credentials that western healers maintain in western systems, Velazquez' approach is seen as respectful and allows for dialogue followed by intervention with her specialty approach to be used. Other interventions might produce conflict, something that Velazquez attempts to avoid.

Velazquez respects Talcott Parsons's concept of "affective neutrality," that is, the notion that doctors in this society are expected to remain affectively neutral from the client, but embellishes it with culturally responsive techniques. As a *curandera*, this allows her to be involved in the personal spiritual lives of her clients, attending rosaries, funerals and other cultural and religious functions with them. This adds credibility to her status and reinforces the notion that she cares about her clients, providing her entrance into a family structure that is generally private and highly valued. Anyone admitted into the "business of the family" has to be a special person; the family is central to the existence of Mexican-American culture. Family allegiance, loyalty, and obligation are primary values adhered to in this cultural system.

By blending the Western view of physician/client relationships with a culturally specific role determined by Indigenous/Mexicano/Chicano culture, Velazquez allows patients of diverse acculturation levels to have their cultural expectations of what a "doctor" does fulfilled, as well as having their culturally specific expectations met. This syncretic approach maintains respect for both systems, without reducing the effectiveness of either one. Velazquez describes one instance in which a client refused to take psychiatric medication because she was "not *loca* (crazy)." Through a blending of rituals designed by Velazquez, the client agreed to take the psychiatric medication mixed with tea. With permission given by the psychiatrist, the client mixed the anti-psychotic medication with the tea and was rid of some of the delusional and paranoid thinking. Trust with *la curandera* was immediately established.

The practice of *curanderismo* has met with mixed reactions from the mental health and psychiatric community. Many local psychiatrists have taken risks and explored this concept; others have remained firmly within their traditional boundaries as

Western systems healers. Even former staff members at Centro de las Familias have given *curanderismo* mixed reviews. Recalls Velazquez:

They presented a case of a woman who believed she was hexed. A social worker commented, "Well, maybe if I wear a long black robe and get some feathers, and make some noises, she'll think she got well." I became very upset about that ...I confronted the person. I told the person that this was nothing to laugh about ...This was a turning point in my life.

The Colorado State Division of Mental Health is aware of *curanderismo* and sanctions it as a viable form of transcultural psychiatry. According to Velazquez, both the State Division of Mental Health and the internal quality assurance team at the mental health center scrutinize her record keeping. The *remedios* (remedies) she prescribes for clients and her treatment plans are also approved by the staff psychiatrist, particularly when they are used in conjunction with special teas and additional preparations. The psychiatrist's blessing allows for the Chicano community's psychiatric needs to be met without violating any codes of medical and/or psychiatric treatment.

## MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY

Having moved from being the secretary at Centro de las Familias, to clinical supervisor and, in November of 1993, manager, Velazquez is well versed in all aspects of community mental health and their relevant applications. She works with psychiatrists on her staff that are interested in cross-cultural psychology and healing methods, and, as a clinical supervisor with a staff of seven, she is also responsible for the care of approximately 250 clients.

Velazquez has never been formally trained as a public administrator or attended classes relative to theories of management. "I am a *curandera*," she says. "I live the life of a *curandera*. That is how I treat people. I use my intuition in dealing with people, no matter who they are." She adds,

The way that I manage is the way I've always done with my life, the way I was a clinician, and the way that I was a clinical supervisor. It's all intuitive, or what I prefer to call God's hand guiding me, and just knowing the right thing to do at the right time. Knowing when to keep my mouth shut and when to open it.

Velazquez feels that in order to administer *curanderismo* one must be qualified and understand the philosophy of *curanderismo*; one must also be spiritual, or able to keep "the mind, body and soul together."

Spirit is what gives you the joy of living. It's what gives you the love to give to other people. It's what creates the nourishment for others. It is the ability to see the spirit of others. To me, the spirit doesn't necessarily mean religious, but that part of you that when you walk into a room people can feel you. It's

# The Applied Anthropologist

DEL CASTILLO



Cultural Rituals...

when you walk into a large room and the other person can feel you because your spirit is calling out to them.

Velazquez learned some of the more formal aspects of management through her longevity at the clinic, working under the supervision of a variety of executive directors and managers, all of whom used their management philosophies in administering clinical services, including *curanderismo*, to community residents. At some level, Diana was the spiritual leader of the clinic, always looking out for the health of the clinic. Her organic view of management is really about knowing human behavior and its many manifestations, augmented with a lot of common sense; similar to how she works with her clients. After 19 years of employment, Velazquez sees culture as the basis for *Centro de las Familias*: "I think if the manager did not have a good cultural face that the clinic would die."

In addition, Velazquez advocates a democratic style of management:

I don't make unilateral decisions unless it's absolutely necessary ...that it needs to be done ...because I have to make a decision right this minute. There have been times that I have had to make that kind of a decision and come back [to the team] and say, "Look I had to do this, and it's done." But I like to talk to them individually, and I am also up front with them by saying, "This is what I want." And they say, "Well, if that's what you want then let's go for it." What I try to do is work it so that they feel that they have participated. They buy into it. Then, they go for it.

Velazquez also notes that clients participate in the planning process at the clinic: "They're very much a part of the clinic. They think the clinic belongs to them, because it does." As manager, Velazquez incorporates cultural competency into her communication with clients. One of the cultural characteristics she describes is referred to as *personalismo*, not in the political sense maybe defined in Mexican culture, but rather the building of relationships with others. Every time a new client or a new patient is admitted, I come out and I meet them, and I greet them, and I tell them who I am and what my function is. I speak to them in their own language. The ambience of the clinic is also culturally relevant to the clientele. While psychiatric settings are generally mundane and institutional, Velazquez describes *Centro de las Familias* as

...a small clinic that looks very much like a home. You walk in in the morning and you can smell beans cooking and bacon frying because someone is always cooking. Clients walk in there and we offer them food. Clients are greeted and offered a cup of coffee. All of the psychiatrists ...talk to the people that come in. We all say good morning. We all greet them. It's not like we pretend that they are not there. This is very important ...to me that people feel welcomed when they walk in, whether they are patients or not. Whether they are there be-

cause it's snowing outside and they have to wait for the bus, or they're very psychotic. The fact that they are psychotic does not mean that they don't deserve to be greeted.

## Hiring Culturally Sensitive Staff

While hiring new staff is an integral task performed by any clinic manager, hiring mental health therapists for *Centro de las Familias* has its own additional challenges. Because mental health workers have mostly been trained in Western systems approaches, many come into community mental health without knowledge of any other system. This can pose problems for Velazquez. There is, she says, "a lot of fear around what I can and cannot do." On the other hand, many prospective employees come through the door looking specifically for an experience with Velazquez: they want to understand *curanderismo* and how to work with Chicano clientele.

Although there is generally a lack of culturally competent therapists available in the mental health system, Velazquez seeks out the most qualified person willing to work in a nontraditional setting. Many non-Latinos have worked at *Centro de las Familias*. Velazquez expects only a willingness to learn and understand cross-cultural psychology.

I look for a person that is not looking for a story clinical model. If that's what you want, don't bother to apply ...You don't have to be Latino, you can be Anglo, but you do need to know if you don't have the awareness, you need to be open and learn.

Therapists who are hired to work on the team must also demonstrate a sense of loyalty to the clinic: "I need loyalty to the clinic, complete loyalty to the clinic. You can say to me, 'I hate this place,' but don't walk out the door and talk bad about *Centro de las Familias*."

## Treatment Considerations

Psychological evaluations are administered to all clients who enter the mental health system; utilizing a Western systems approach to classification in order to determine the diagnosis of the client being evaluated. According to Velazquez, there are also times when a *curandero/a* will utilize cultural diagnostics specific to disorders that only a *curandero/a* can diagnose and treat, suggesting that there has to be a negotiation process wherein the psychiatrist pays deference to the *curandero/a*. For this to occur without resistance, the *curandero/a* and the psychiatrist must have a healthy working relationship, respecting each other's abilities. There is a definite learning curve that a psychiatrist must be willing to experience; the *curandero/a* must also be willing to venture into a different approach to healing.

From a legal perspective, only psychiatrists are qualified and sanctioned to write medication prescriptions for mental health clients. According to Velazquez, there are times when the *curandero/a* must also prescribe *remedios* (remedies) wherein natural medicine is mixed with teas. Sometimes natural medicine is prescribed with culturally specific rituals that must be approved by the psychiatrist. On other occasions, a mixture of





# The Applied Anthropologist

DEL CASTILLO

Cultural Rituals...

traditional psychiatric medication in combination with a ritual is used to obtain optimum results. For this type of collaboration to occur, there must be understanding, willingness and agreement on the part of both the psychiatrist and *curandero/a*. This often requires a special sensitivity on the part of the psychiatrist. Trust between the two healers is critical at this stage of the treatment process. According to Velazquez, at Centro de las Familias this sort of trust led to a

...psychiatric setting [in which it was] understood what they [patients] were talking about. And although the psychiatrists would not say, "Yes, you do have a hex," they would say, "Yes, we do have a *curandera* that can heal you if you believe in that." Some of the psychiatrists that we do have, and maybe not all of them, they don't necessarily believe in it, but they believe that it works. And for me that's what is important. That you don't believe in it but you're able to say "Look, this means nothing to me but it means something to that person, go ahead and do it." I've been at it for 22 years and it's much more accepted, but I can't say that for every single person in this whole city. But it has become very respectable.

## Conclusion

This paper demonstrates how indigenous healers can work within mainstream psychiatric systems in the treatment of mental health clients through the use of *curanderismo*, a holistic philosophy of healing that was introduced to Southwest Denver Mental Health Center/Mental Health Corporation of Denver. The paper further illustrates that through open systems approaches, mental health centers can learn from indigenous healers often referred to as ethno psychiatrists or transcultural healers with reciprocity as an outcome without healers from each of the systems compromising the distinctive characteristics that define each of the healing systems. The paper describes how effective collaboration can be created between *curanderas/os* and psychiatrists with have positive outcomes with mental health patients. The introduction of a transcultural healer eventually led to increased organizational cultural competency defined as a "set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or amongst professionals, and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work efficiently in cross cultural situations," (Cross, et. al., 1988), within the system. The paper validates *curanderismo* as one of the building blocks of this organization.

There are implications for future research demonstrated from this paper if organizations are willing to develop cross cultural strategies with community healers from various cultures and groups. From the standpoint of anthropology, this paper can serve as an impetus for further research in mainstream psychiatric facilities willing to push the envelope in addressing mental illness and alternative systems of healing, with well-defined methodological research strategies.

## References

- Alvarado, Ernesto, Ph.D., interviews by author, tape recordings, Denver, CO 27 and 29 August 1997.
- Cordova, Gloria, interview by author, tape recording, Pueblo, CO, 14 September 1997.
- Cross, I. Terry; Isaacs, R. Mareasa; Bazron, R. Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care: A Monograph on Effective Services for Minority Children Who Are Severely Emotionally Disturbed. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Child Development Center for Children's Mental Health, 1992 (reprinted).
- Denzin, Norman K. The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co, 1970.
- Denzin, Norman K. The Research Act. New York: McGraw Hill, 1978, 1982.
- Denzin, Norman K. Sociological Methods: A Sourcebook. Chicago: Aldine, 1972.
- Kiev, A. *Curanderismo: Mexican-American Folk Psychiatry*. Free Press: New York, 1968.
- Korte, Alvin, O. "Despedidas as Reflections of Death in Hispanic New Mexico." In Sotomayor, Martha & Garcia, Alejandro. (Eds.) *La Familia: Traditions and Realities*. Washington, D. C.: National Council on Aging, 1999.
- Kurtz, Richard A. and Chalfant, H. Paul. *The Sociology of Medicine and Illness*. Allyn and Bacon Inc.: Boston, 1984.
- Lucero, Aileen, Ph.D. *A Profile of a Curandera and Her Curandera-Treated Clients: The Southwest Denver Community Mental Health Center*. Washington State University, Department of Sociology, 1981.
- Foster, George. M. "Relationships Between Spanish and Spanish-American Folk Medicine." *Journal of American Folklore*, 1953, 66, pp. 201-217.
- Madsen, W. *Mexican-Americans of South Texas*. (2nd ed.). Holt, Rinehart, and Winston: New York, 1964.
- Madsen, W. "Value conflicts and folk psychotherapy." In A. Kiev (Ed.), *Magic, Faith and Healing*. Free Press: New York, 1964, (pp. 420-444).
- Paz, Octavio. *The Labyrinth of Solitude and other Writings*. New York: Grove Press, 1985.
- Polak, Paul, Dr., interview by author, tape recording, Denver, CO, 1 September 1997.
- Perrone, Bobette and Stockel, H. Henrietta and Kruger, Victoria. *Medicine Women: Curanderas, and Women Doctors*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1989.
- Romano, O. I. "Charismatic Medicine, Folk-Healing, and Folk Sainthood." *American Anthropologist*, 1965, 67, 1151-1173.
- Rubel, Arthur J. "The epidemiology of a folk illness: susto in Hispanic America." In Martinez, Ricardo Arguillo (Ed.), *Hispanic Culture and Health Care: Fact, Fiction, and Folklore*. The C.V. Mosby Company: Saint Louis, 1978.
- Trotter, Robert T. II and Chavira, Juan Antonio. "Curanderismo: an Emic Theoretical Perspective of Mexican-American Folk Medicine." In *Medical Anthropology*, Fall, 1980.
- Velazquez, Diana, interviews by author, tape recordings, Denver, CO, 23 July 1993 and 30 June 1997.

## COMMENTARY

THE *DESPEDIDA* FOR DIANA VELASQUEZ, CURANDERA

RAMON DEL CASTILLO

What follows may be seen as accompanying the article on the *Curandera* Diana Velázquez in the above section. This section shares stories of cultural rituals utilized in a formal mental health clinic based in Denver, Colorado under the auspices of Southwest Denver Community Mental Health at a time when community mental health centers were open to community innovation. One of the strategies are used in the Mexican American & Indigenous cultures and consist of poetry called *Despedidas* (farewells) or poetic renditions when recovering from loss that were created during and after the author directed psychiatric services for community residents are analyzed as a culturally specific method used in healing. The second strategy consists of a ritual in the Corn Mother Tradition/Wisdom Keeper regarding the *curandera* who practiced holistic healing in *El Centro de las Familias* for over 25 years and was selected as a Corn Mother posthumously.

*La despedida* [the farewell] is a poetic rendition or written narrative, a farewell to a departed soul whose memory will be preserved through the written word. It is the process of sharing in the sorrows of barrio life. Generally, recited as part of a eulogy, at a *velorio* [wake], a religious ceremony, or a gathering of friends and family, *la despedida* emanates from a yearning to remember the person who has transcended into another existence. *La Despedida* is one of many cultural healing ceremonies utilized by indigenous and *Mexicano* groups to honor the passing of a soul. Poems or written narratives are based on the deceased person's life accomplishments with descriptors such as favorite songs, flowers, special images, music or special attributes known by the writer (del Castillo, 2012).

*Despedidas* complement the celebration of the departed during "*Día de los Muertos*." Indigenous populations in Mexico unlike North Americans, who view death as the end of life, view death as a continuation of life. As famous philosopher Octavio Paz stated, "Death is a mirror which reflects the vain gesticulations of the living... Life extended into death and vice versa. Life, death and resurrection were stages of a cosmic process, which repeated itself continuously" (Paz, 1985: 54). *Despedidas* can take a variety of forms. National researcher Dr. Alvin Korte states, "Hispanos (as) in Northern New Mexico remember the death of a loved one by a type of written narrative referred to as a *recuerdo*, a remembrance" (Korte, 1999: 149). It is with this introduction that I share my *despedida* for Diana Velazquez as a part of my termination rituals for my mentor, teacher and friend.

### Blessed Corn Mother

#### A *Despedida* to Diana Velazquez

From a *colonia* en San Antonio<sup>1</sup>,  
a place where *raza*<sup>2</sup> dreams of  
recovering stolen lands  
as they blow smoke at an unholy treaty,  
she came, marrying into a family  
of *curanderos* from Sonora  
in a traditional *matrimonio*<sup>3</sup>.  
Her battered body  
always dangled by a thread  
as she battled in wretched spirit worlds;  
she stepped into *nepantla*,  
scared space between two mediating worlds;  
but now her body hangs onto a smoldering dream  
while a *machete* dripping from the blood of  
spiritual wars drops to the ground. But she  
leaves not defeated.

We, however, feel cheated  
as a humming bird flies away into the night.

To us, she came, a healer  
a *curandera* with open arms  
a personality full of charms  
to purify the air, *llena de mal puesto*<sup>4</sup>  
and life's harms.

She was surrounded by a healing aura  
with extra sensory perception  
identifying hidden deception  
born with "*el don*"<sup>5</sup>  
the gift of healing  
performing a cultural rite  
followed by rituals  
as she lit sage  
on the stage  
of life

men imprisoned in a cage  
to cleanse souls full of burning rage.

She stood amongst us  
with radiance  
sharing historical knowledge  
never taught in college.  
She possessed magical powers  
A spiritual needle and thread  
to sew up historical sores  
or settle old scores;  
she came to heal wounded spirits

# The Applied Anthropologist

DEL CASTILLO



The despedida...

full of pain and sorrow  
stuck in human crevices  
needing *una limpia*,<sup>16</sup>  
while a faint light of *una vela*<sup>7</sup>  
provided an abundance of wisdom  
a glimmer of hope  
to stop the mope  
the languishing tears of a lost tomorrow.  
She was a blessed corn mother extraordinaire  
with a bag full of *remedios*<sup>8</sup>  
extracted from *la tierra*<sup>9</sup>  
where she now rests in peace.  
*Adios Doña Diana Velazquez.*

The next ritual has to do with Corn Mothers. Diana Velazquez was selected as a corn mother posthumously. As human beings become allies with Mother Nature, their combined energies create sacred space, a communion between brothers and sisters. Corn Mothers are ubiquitous; many times we have passed by them on street corners, in *colonias*, or *tienditas*<sup>10</sup> never noticing the balance and beauty they bring to our world. Corn Mothers are sacred women providing direction to families and communities, sacrosanct mythological beings, safeguarding stories of birth, life and death. They are the holders of the Corn Culture. They possess knowledge inherent in *la tierra sagrada*<sup>11</sup>. Through *medicina de la naturaleza*<sup>12</sup>, cultural rituals and spiritual rites, they provide *remedios* for *almas*<sup>13</sup> on the verge of destruction. They mend wounded spirits disassociated from their bodies, fleeing; then, seeking forgiveness, unable to understand the melancholy of the times caused by the many pressures in a fast paced society where technology invades private spheres.

Corn Mothers are *las guias*<sup>14</sup> full of *conocimiento*<sup>15</sup> providing direction about life and its many challenges. They do so with respect and a deep understanding about the power of knowledge as it is transformed into human behavior, acting upon an unjust world. They are *consejeras*<sup>16</sup> of *la comunidad* providing ameliorative support to those in need. Corn Mothers teach humility in a society that preaches "I" as the center of the universe. They never lose faith, rekindling hope into dejected spirits before they completely dissipate. Corn Mothers defend evil spirits from meddling into our dreams; they do this through *limpias*, the cleansing of the spirit through ritual. They pass on traditions that have withstood foreign intrusion by those seeking control over others. They have struggled against sins of omission through the creation of omnificient energy.

New Corn Mothers are born every day. They come from all cultures and walks of life. Many have become philosophers, writers, artists, historians, doctors and lawyers picking up the banner for social justice. Others live simple existences, in touch with the important things in life. Other Corn Mothers have trekked down paths, sojourners crossing fictitious *fronteras*<sup>17</sup>, women working in sweat shops and lettuce fields, caring for families in *colonias y barrios* with *amor y carino*<sup>18</sup>.

## Corn Mothers

Corn mothers never oblivious  
to cries of children  
who are mischievous  
carrying *toallas*<sup>19</sup>  
soaked with *lagrimas*<sup>20</sup>  
*abrazando los niños*<sup>21</sup> suffering  
from broken hearts  
from poisonous darts  
sons and daughters  
fighting unjust wars  
coming home with  
emotional scars.  
Corn mothers  
We honor your presence  
*con el amor*  
*y el sabor*  
*de la vida sagrada*  
*muy dignificada*<sup>22</sup>.  
Autor (2012)

Diana Velazquez, a *curandera* who left an indelible imprint on this earth, was honored posthumously as a Corn Mother during the first year of the project. The respect she gained bridging modern and traditional medicine, specifically *curanderismo* into formal institutions has yet to reach its pinnacle. I myself recommended that Diana be selected as a corn mother. What served as a spiritual impetus to this was the death of my mother whose friend, an elderly woman from Tennessee, stated after my mother's death, "I want my flowers when I am alive," reminding us that life is precious and human beings should be honored while they walk this earth.

Curanderas surrounded by healing auras  
with extra sensory perception  
identifying hidden deception  
born with "el don"  
the gift of healing  
performing a cultural rite  
followed by rituals  
as they burn sage  
on the stage  
of life  
to men imprisoned in a cage  
to cleanse souls full of burning rage.  
Del Castillo (2012)





# The Applied Anthropologist



DEL CASTILLO



The *despedida*...

## Notes

1. Mexican neighborhood
2. Refers to Mexican and/or Chicano people
3. Matrimony
4. Full of evil
5. The gift
6. A cleaning
7. A candle
8. Remedies
9. The earth
10. Little stores
11. The sacred earth
12. Natural medicine
13. Souls
14. Guides
15. Knowledge
16. Counselors
17. Borders
18. Affection
19. Towels
20. Tears
21. Hugging the children
22. With the love and taste of the sacred and very dignified life

## References

Del Castillo, Ramon.

1988 "Adios Don Francesco." In *Broken Concrete*, Oakland, CA: Unity Publications, 2003:13.

N.A.

2011 "Blessed Corn Mother A *Despedida* to Diana Velazquez." Unpublished Poem written for her passing. Denver, Colorado, 2003:13

Korte, Alvin, O.

1999 "Despedidas as Reflections of Death in Hispanic New Mexico." In So-tomayor, Martha & Garcia, Alejandro. (Eds.) *La Familia: Traditions and Realities*. Washington, D. C.: National Council on Aging.

Paz, Octavio

1961 *The Labyrinth of Solitude and other Writings*. New York: Grove Press.



# The Applied Anthropologist

Vol. 35

No. 2

2015

## COMMENTARY

UTZ AK'ASLEMAR: HOLISTIC HEALTH IN SAN MARCOS  
LA LAGUNA

IAN BONESTEEL

### ABSTRACT

The Kaqchikel speaking people of San Marcos have a definition of health that encompasses much more than the Western idea of *salud* (health) implies. The translation of the word *salud* into Kaqchikel relates to not just one but several different words and phrases that, while similar, have different meanings. It is these words that signify not just freedom from disease, but also quality of social relationships, cleanliness and order in the household and environment, living with tranquility and a life free of problems. These perceptions of wellbeing confront many of the problems that lead to illness in a more biomedical sense, problems that are only just beginning to be acknowledged in western medicine. One such problem is the use of alcohol, mostly among men, and the effects it has not only on those who drink alcohol but also on their social relationships and the lack of economic resources it causes their family. Alcohol consumption I found to be one of the largest problems for the Marqueños both socially and as a cause of disease.

### Research Context

This research I conducted during the summer of 2012 through North Carolina State University's Guatemala Ethnographic Field School, directed by Dr. Tim Wallace and Doctoral Candidate Carla Pezzia. I was one of twenty-one students who lived with Mayan families in separate towns surrounding Lake Atitlán for seven weeks. Lectures were held with our instructors Tim and Carla in different towns around the lake one to two days a week in which we discussed ethnographic field methods, research logistics, and eventually individual research projects.

My homestay family and the overwhelming majority of Mayans in my town identified their first language as Kaqchikel. Almost everyone spoke Spanish as well though many elders spoke little to no Spanish, thus the following data was collected in Spanish by myself alone.

### Medical Anthropology and the Emic Perspective of

**Health** Medical anthropology stresses the importance of viewing health from a holistic and emic perspective in attempting to understand the many different factors that affect health, not solely physical biology. This includes a person's or a community's culture as a whole including the social, economic, political, and religious factors surrounding a person and/or community. Studying all of these aspects of life can lead to important insights about the nature of health and the causes of wellness and sickness in that community as physical health is subject to a person's psychological and social climate (Banasik & Copstead 2013). Understanding health, or any concept or practice, through the eyes of the local people, is called an emic perspective, in contrast to the etic perspective or the view of the outsider, such as the researcher, government worker, or aid agency. Throughout the world today, there are many international development aid projects, many relating to health and healthcare systems. As Singer and Baer (2012)

point out, the value of anthropological research in public health interventions fulfills "an increasingly recognized need to enhance the cultural competence of health care providers." Medical anthropology and its variants aim to study the various aspects of a community's life in order to gain a comprehensive or holistic understanding of the nature of illness and wellness in that community and in some instances, inform culturally appropriate interventions for that community's health status.

### My Study

The purpose of my study was to understand what the locals of San Marcos La Laguna believe is important to be a healthy person from their own traditional perspectives. The idea of health and well-being is quite a subjective term and in the United States often varies from person to person, and I imagined it would vary from culture to culture. I wanted to try and understand what it is for the locals of San Marcos that constitutes a healthy life. Some of my preliminary interactions with the Marqueños showed me that they do have some knowledge of western public health practices through contact with non-Mayans. Asking about the word *salud* often elicited this information. It was through several of these interactions that I realized that because the people of San Marcos speak Kaqchikel as their first language, the Spanish word *salud* called up much of this biomedical and public health information. It is not whether or not they know this information that interested me, but what traditional ideas about being 'well' they have aside from the information introduced by Western culture. Inherent in trying to understand their idea of wellbeing was to understand the words and language they use to describe this idea, or these ideas. I wanted to learn the Kaqchikel word for, or interpretation of *salud*, and then attempt to learn about the connotations and minute implications of this word.

# The Applied Anthropologist

BONESTEEL



Utz Ak'asleamar...

## Overview of San Marcos La Laguna

San Marcos La Laguna is a small town in Guatemala on the shore of Lake Atitlán. Guatemala is home to about 13.9 million people of which roughly 60% are Indigenous Maya. Of the 30 Mayan languages currently spoken in Guatemala and Mexico, 22 of them are spoken in Guatemala. The central highlands is an area of temperate forests and home to a high percentage of the indigenous population. It is in this highland region that the volcanic Lake Atitlán lies between the two largest cities in the country, *Ciudad de Guatemala* (Guatemala City) and Quetzaltenango. The lake sits at just over 5,000 ft above sea level and is located in the Department (Province) of Sololá in which the city of Sololá is the capital. A short ten minute bus ride from the center square of Sololá on an old refurbished Blue Bird school bus takes one to Panajachel on the lake's shore, the main hub for the rest of the towns on Lake Atitlán. San Marcos sits in a small lagoon on the northwest corner of the lake, a forty-five minute boat ride from Panajachel.

San Marcos is home to a mainly indigenous population that speaks a variety of Kaqchikel that is somewhat mixed with Tzutujil, another language from the Mayan language family spoken in the neighboring towns of San Pablo and San Pedro to the West and South respectively. Within the past 15 years or so, San Marcos has experienced an influx of ex-patriots and tourists leading to a noticeable presence of Europeans and North Americans in some parts of town, *Barrio Tres* (Neighborhood Three) specifically.

San Marcos is separated into three neighborhoods, *Barrio Uno* (Neighborhood One), *Barrio Dos* (Neighborhood Two), and *Barrio Tres* (Neighborhood Three), which are fairly distinct geographically. The majority of the town sits on the hillsides of a valley, the middle of which is more sparsely populated. Barrio Uno and Barrio Dos encompass the homes of the majority of the local Kaqchikel population whose houses climb up the steep hills on either side of the valley towards *el Monte* (The Mountain) until the hills are too steep for buildings, after which there are organized plots of various crops. The uninhabited mountains loom over the town at a seemingly unreachable height where the low-flying puffy clouds flirt with the mountain peaks. These mountains are covered with lush green trees and foliage interspersed with cultivated land where some of the Marqueños grow coffee plants for cash income and other crops for consumption. At the upper reaches of *Barrio Uno* and *Dos*, the stone paths that wind around the cinderblock and adobe brick houses end at the top of the neighborhoods and turn into narrow dirt paths that continue up into the mountains. *Barrio Tres* sits in the valley in between the other two neighborhoods closer to the shore of the lake. Between the shore of the lake and the road between the neighboring towns, San Pablo and Tz'ununa', sits the majority of the hotels and tourists restaurants, called *La Playa* (The Beach). Above the road but still in *Barrio Tres* are the homes of more local Marqueños. On this cen-

ter road, closer to the lake and below the lower regions of both *Barrio Uno* and *Dos* sit the center of town with a central park, an amphitheater, the temporary *puesto de salud* (Health Center), the primary and two secondary schools, the *Cancha de Basketball* (Basketball Court), six small convenience stores, a bookstore, the Catholic church, and the pathways down to the soccer field and the shore. This is a central area of social activity for locals of all ages of San Marcos.

## The Means to Information

During the course of my research in San Marcos I used various forms of data collection including informal and formal interviews, quantitative questionnaires, pile sorts, and time allocation. The first method I will discuss here is the foundation of all ethnographic work: participant observation, where the researcher lives with the people he/she is studying in an attempts to see and understand life from their perspective.

## Building rapport

To gather data in ethnographic research one must build rapport with the people being studied. Introducing myself and explaining my reason for being in San Marcos was the first step in gathering information. I would go out and walk around the town with the sole purpose of meeting as many people as I could and visiting the people I had already met. The orientation and relative isolation of the *barrios* of San Marcos, especially *Barrio Dos*, required these trips. I lived in *Barrio Dos*, and while the people in close proximity to my homestay were easily accessible, it was a 10 minute walk to arrive at the bottom of *Barrio Uno* and to arrive at some of the farther reaches of this neighborhood was at least twenty minutes of steep climbing. These trips were extremely important because *Barrio Uno* is so isolated from the rest of the town and yet is the home of a large number of locals.

Another important element of participant observation is to learn some language basics of the people being studied, so I tried to learn some basic phrases in Kaqchikel. Short greetings

Table 1

Kaqchikel <sup>1</sup>	Spanish	English
sak'aʃ	Buenas días	Good morning
ʃ k'aq' Irj	Buenas tardes	Good afternoon
ʃ k'o' or ʃ k'a'	Buenas noches	Good evening
chug'k'chek'	Hasta mañana	See you tomorrow
un'rachek'	Hasta luego	See you later
nak'wach'a'be'	¿Cómo te llamas?	What is your name?
nu' be'yin "lan"	Me llamo "lan"	My name is "lan"
utz awach	¿Cómo estás?	How are you?
utz matioʃ	Estoy bien gracias.	I'm well thank you.
wax a tu b'awʌ	¿A dónde vas?	Where are you going?
xi b'awʌ "Panajachel"	Voy a "Panajachel"	I'm going to "Panajachel."
ʃ ime loj pa'	Acabo de regresar.	I just returned.
bana' wunutzil	por favor	please







and salutations made meeting people much easier as I could walk by someone and simply say, "Good afternoon" in Kaqchikel and this would often lead to a short conversation or introduction. Some of the Kaqchikel language basics I learned and recorded during my time in San Marcos are presented in Table 1.

Short impromptu conversations with people in town served as the foundation which made the rest of my data gathering methods possible and also provided small insights and pieces of information along the way that guided my research process.

## Informal Interviews

Many times during my time in San Marcos, a brief conversation would turn into a long conversation about peoples' lives and their thoughts about life in San Marcos. While seemingly shy walking through the streets, once one makes the first step of good faith with a smile or greeting, the Marqueños are very talkative and at times are very open about their lives. Whether it was an initial introduction, a later meeting, or during the course of some other data collection some Marqueños volunteered information that I did not expect but that ended up being useful for gaining a better understanding of life there and their perspectives of well being. Many times during these interactions the fact that I was in San Marcos doing research came about simply through introductions but regardless, in all interactions I was explicit in my role as a researcher. I asked permission to write about the things that we talked about and they were always happy to be able to help me.

## Formal Interviews

As I became more familiar with the people of San Marcos and the kind of information I was interested in, I developed questions for formal interviews. Well being is a somewhat lofty topic precisely because it is so subjective. Trying to pinpoint

specific practices, manifestations, and explanations of this idea in another culture proved more difficult than I had imagined, and even made me question my own ideas about well being. Once I got a better grasp of this, I made up a formal interview, which after a few changes included the questions in Table 2. While by no means perfect, the information produced from conducting this interview gave me many insights into the lives of the Marqueños. I conducted the interview with five different people, two women from *Barrio Dos*, two women from *Barrio Uno*, and a man from *Barrio Tres*. While there were many answers that were consistent among all the interviewees, I cannot take these results alone as being representative of the entire town because of my non-random sampling. To increase the validity of my results I would have had to interview men from both Barrio Uno and Dos.

## Quantitative Questionnaire

I conducted a quantitative questionnaire of twenty core questions and five demographic questions with twenty Kaqchikel speaking Marqueños. I asked questions with a range of topics including bathing habits, their beliefs about the cause of illness, nutrition, and where they get their nutrition information. I will refer to some of the results I gathered throughout the paper.

## Health and Wellbeing in San Marcos La Laguna

In beginning my research, I started with the intent of analyzing Marqueños' health and wellbeing practices from my own perspective, i.e. how much water do they drink, what do they eat on a regular basis, what physical activity do they engage in, etc. As I learned more about the actual problems that face the people of San Marcos, I realized that there was much more to health than solely what I thought was important, despite my education in anthropology.

At the very beginning, I started asking people what was important to be healthy, using the word in Spanish, *salud*, to ask

Table 2

Spanish	English
¿Qué es importante para usted en la vida?	What is important for you in life?
¿Qué es necesario para ser feliz?	What is necessary to be happy?
¿Qué es la palabra en kaqchikel para salud?	What is the word in Kaqchikel for health?
¿Salud es de la mente, del corazón, del cuerpo o de todos?	Health involves the mind, the heart, the body, or all of these?
¿Qué hace una buena persona?	What does a good person do?
Hay muchos ancianos en San Marcos, ¿qué tiene que hacer para llegar a esta edad?	There are many elderly in San Marcos. What does one need to do to reach this age?
¿Cómo cuidan a los varones para que estén saludables?	How do you take care of boys in order for them to be healthy?
¿Cómo cuidan a las niñas para que estén saludables?	How do you take care of girls in order for them to be healthy?
¿Qué tiene que hacer una mujer para estar saludable?	What is necessary for a woman to do in order to be healthy?
¿Qué tiene que hacer un hombre para estar saludable?	What is necessary for a man to do in order to be healthy?
¿Qué tipos de comida son buena para comer?	What types of food are good to eat?
¿En dónde nació usted?	Where were you born?
¿Qué idioma hablan sus padres?	What language do your parents speak?
¿Cuántos años tiene?	How old are you?
¿Cuál es su religión?	What is your religion?



these questions. I found that using this word seemed to click a switch in peoples' heads, evoking almost scripted responses of information that obviously came from Western public health practices. Common answers to "¿Qué es importante para la salud?" (What is important for your health?) were responses such as it was necessary to wash one's hands, eat fruits and vegetables, not eat fat, etc. The strongest indicator for me that I was receiving recently introduced information was the reply 'drink eight glasses of water a day.' I knew that I did not want to spend my summer writing about the importance of washing one's hands and eating fruits and vegetables. I wanted to understand these people's traditional beliefs of wellbeing. At a certain point I realized that to understand their traditional beliefs, I was going to have to try and understand their words for these concepts. As Spanish is not the first language of the Marqueños, I was going to have to understand their words in Kaqchikel for health.

## Translating Salud

Through my formal interviews and various informal interviews, I asked people what the word for *salud* was in Kaqchikel and I got different responses from different people and even different responses from the same people. I then asked those people and others what those words meant. Never did anyone translate these words back into *salud* but gave me a separate explanation, often a long description with many different elements. Here I will give the four most common words or phrases that were given as translations of *salud* and attempt to explain their meanings.

### [utz ak'asleamar]<sup>2</sup>

This is the most common response I got when I asked for the Kaqchikel translation of *salud*. It literally means 'good life', with "utz" meaning 'good', and "ak'asleamar" meaning 'life'. I have come to understand it as, in addition to the biomedical concept of health in terms of being free physical sickness, everything else that the Marqueños view as being important in life including education, having respect for the family, the community, and the environment, not drinking alcohol, living cleanly, eating well, living in tranquility, leaving your problems to the side, and not fighting. It is a "*manera de vivir*" (manner of living). Other phrases that were used to describe *utz ak'asleamar* were, "*el futuro*" (the future), "*cuidemos la vida*" (we look after life), "*la vida es importante*" (life is important) and, "*responsabilidad de la vida*" (responsibility for life). A response that I found especially endearing was *utz ak'asleamar* as a way to describe the proper way to harvest plants in that it is important to respect the plants one is harvesting. *Utz ak'asleamar* is related to the word [chirij' ak'asleamar] which literally means 'past life'. Framing *utz ak'asleamar* in the perspective of *chirij' ak'asleamar* can help shed light on the point of view of *utz ak'asleamar*. *Chirij' ak'asleamar* is in a sense looking at a person from the point of view of an outsider, from a distance or looking back on someone's life and knowing that they lived this 'good life.' *Utz ak'asleamar* is something that can be said when someone dies to say that they lived a good

life. It can also be said when saying goodbye, with the hopes that they live a good life without getting into bad situations, "*que no metas en malas cosas*" (don't get into bad things). In essence it can be seen as a life without problems, a conscientious manner of living in harmony with one's self, family, community, environment, and everything necessary to sustain life.

### [chojsanriij]

In its most simple interpretation, *choj'sanriij* means cleanliness. While this idea seems to be contained within *utz ak'asleamar*, it was nevertheless one of the responses I got from a few individuals when I asked for the translation of *salud* in Kaqchikel. It expresses order in the household, the importance of bathing and wearing clean clothes, that everything in the house is clean, proper hygiene, and that all the food is covered to protect it from flies and insects. Many informants would give me only this word for meaning *salud* or this in addition to other words listed here. All of my informants when asked about these words brought up the importance of cleanliness, especially clean clothes, whether or not the word *chojsanriij* was part of the conversation.

### [nach orsaj awe']

This word is very similar to *utz ak'asleamar* but instead of being an outsider's perspective of a person, it is the feeling one has about one's self, that one is living *utz ak'asleamar*. One informant described it with the words "la limpieza sale de la casa. Primero en la casa y después en la clase, en la comunidad" (cleanliness comes from the house. First in the house, then in the class, in the community). Another informant described it as "*vida bonita*" (beautiful life), "*buena mente*" (good mind), "*estar contenta*" (being content) and, "*se siente bonita*" (one feels beautiful). This same person also said that, "*tiene que andar en tranquilidad*" (it's necessary to walk in tranquility) and, "*tiene que vivir en el mundo*" (one has to live in the world) when describing *nach orsaj awe'*. Yet another informant used the phrase, "*ponerse guapo*" (make yourself handsome/pretty) to describe this feeling. Three of my informants explained that part of this feeling is making sure the house is clean and orderly before guests arrive. In a sense, it is the subjective sense of pride in one's self that one is living *utz ak'asleamar*. The closest English translation I can come up with for this word is, "feeling fresh."

### [nquot ayat bil]

My understanding is that this is probably the closest translation to the word *salud* from a Western perspective but was actually the least common response when I asked for the Kaqchikel translation of 'salud.' It was described as explaining the importance of washing one's hands, eating clean food and water, but also that one's mind and heart are clean. The phrase I that all my informants agreed with was, "*la esperanza que no entren las enfermedades*" (the hope that sickness does not enter). This seems word seems to have more focus on the biomedical causes of disease than the other three phrases previously mentioned given that washing hands, drinking clean water and cooking

food properly were more common explanations for *nquot ayat bil* than the others.

Through these various words are said to mean *salud*, it is apparent that their idea of health is much more holistic than what the word *salud* implies. It was after one specific conversation about these words with one of my informants that I felt deeply affected. When I got home I fell down on my bed with my face in my pillow and marveled at how narrow my conception of health was and at the same time what a beautiful view of wellbeing these words implied. The idea that living in tranquility with your neighbors and family and feeling beautiful could be a part of what it means to be healthy I found to be an extraordinary idea. To get at more specifics of these practices, I will explain some of the other information I gathered with the same formal interviews and other means.

## General Health

The most important theme that all of the interviewees mentioned when asked about what good health is, and what a healthy adult does, is stay clean. Every single person brought up the importance of cleanliness. They did not just say washing your hands before you eat but stressed the importance of keeping one's entire self and house clean. When asked the question, ¿Cómo parece una persona saludable?" (How does a healthy person appear?) one of my informant's reply was, "una persona que limpia las cosas" (a person who cleans their things), "toda la casa tiene que estar limpia, todas las cosas ordenadas, tiene que lavar la ropa" (the entire house has to be clean, all things must be organized, one has to wash their clothes). This quote, I feel is a good representation of all the other informants' responses with regards to cleanliness. A few of the interviewees used the word, "higiene" (hygiene). One woman said that it is okay to wear old clothes, as long as they are clean. Another woman stressed the importance of keeping food covered so that flies do not land on it because one can become sick from flies. This same informant said that if one does not keep their lives and everything in it clean, this is one of the ways she believes people become sick. "...limpia las cosas para que no entran enfermedades" (cleans things so that sickness does not enter).

## Health of Adults

The other topic that all of my interviewees brought up upon being asked about health in general and the health of adults, was alcohol. Invariably, they all talked about the importance of not drinking alcohol, mostly for men, but one informant did mention specifically that there were also women who drank and that it is not good for them either. One informant brought up that people when drunk pass out in the street, "viene las moscas en sus labios" (flies come and land on their lips) and then they get sick but also, "muchas personas se mueren así" (many people die like this). Two other informants when asked what was important to live to an old age, they replied that it was fairly simple, just do not drink alcohol.

One of my interviewees brought up that the consumption of alcohol did not just affect the individual but also the family

members. This woman was speaking about herself specifically when she said that her husband drinks and then does not bring money home for the family. This woman has six living children and when there is no money brought in by the husband because he is drinking, there is less food to eat. Often, this woman and her children are only able to eat twice a day. So while alcohol, according to my informant, is bad for a person's health, it also contributes to the inability of her children to keep healthy.

This same informant also described the importance of women not staying in the house all day. Most women's work in San Marcos is solely in the house and she believes that it is important to leave and "relajar la mente" (relax the mind), "hay que compartir y hablar con personas y amigas" (one has to share and talk with friends) and, "compartir las tristezas para sacar las malas cosas" (share sadness in order to leave bad things to the way side). This woman is in a somewhat unique situation relative to the majority of the other people I worked with in that her husband was mostly absent from the house. It is these things above that she does to cope with her situation. She also makes *tejidas* (weavings) to provide at least some income for her children.

More specifically in terms of health for women, two of my interviewees said that it was important that women not have too many children. Traditionally in San Marcos, they said, couples usually had upwards of 8-10 children (ethnography). They said that this was too many and detrimental to the health of the woman to have this many children because then she doesn't have enough time and probably not enough resources to take care of herself as well. Both of these informants, however, have a higher level of education and are exposed to more biomedical information than the average Markeño. One is a mid-wife and has been to four conferences in the US and Mexico on mid-wifery and the other worked for an agricultural association that did analyses of fruits and vegetables from their harvest to their arrival on the supermarket shelves. This was not a view that I found to be universal among my informants but a number of people, especially younger people, said that too many children was not good. In my quantitative questionnaire, I found that out of 14 responses, on average they believe that 7.8 children was too many for the health of the woman. My most common response to this question was four children, which I received six times.

When asked about foods that are healthy to eat, they all mentioned the importance of eating fruits and vegetables, and some, leafy greens that grow in the mountains. They all said that in order to be healthy one has to, "*alimentarse bien*" (nourish oneself well). When asked what foods are healthy to eat they all mentioned fruits and vegetables, but it was only the two that also mentioned the importance of not having too many children that mentioned the consumption of animal products. They both specifically said chicken and fish are healthy to eat and the midwife said meat is good to eat but only two times a week. Three of the interviewees said that whether or not they could feed their families vegetables everyday depended on the economy. The rise and fall in the prices of vegetables as well as the





economic situation of the family affects whether or not they can buy vegetables. One informant said that it is possible to tell whether or not a family is poor based on the size of the children and whether or not they are malnourished.

## Health of Children

When asked about how boys should be cared from, the theme of alcohol came up for every interviewee. They told me boys go out at night and drink and smoke, both tobacco and marijuana, with their friends. For them, keeping the boys close to home and close to the family was the best way to keep them from going out and drinking. Talking with the children everyday, giving them good advice, making sure they are studying and respecting the family, they said, are all ways of raising healthy boys. Only one informant mentioned that it was important for boys to engage in sports.

Raising girls seemed to a much less problematic process. They did not worry about girls going out and drinking because it is much more normal for the girls to stay in the house with the family and not go out. Having babies at a young age is something that three informants brought up. "Soltar tener bebe" (Let loose having a child) was what one woman said and another echoed the sentiments of the last and that it is important that girls only be friends with boys. The male informant brought up the fact that in certain grades the children receive sexual education but "la educación sexual no ha tenido éxito" (sexual education hasn't been a success) because everyone just does the opposite. Two other informants brought up this same issue. Two informants said that keeping the girls close to the family and watching over them is the best way to keep them from having children too early. Finally, one informant brought up rape, that it is important for the family to keep girls aware of this. Open communication between the girls and family is the best way to keep girls safe they said.

## Quantitative Questionnaire

In my qualitative questionnaire, instead of asking people what was necessary to be healthy, I asked what were the reasons that people get sick. My questionnaire reaffirmed some of the things that were said in my formal interviews in a more systematic manner. Out of 20 people, 15 believed that adults become sick from drinking alcohol, 13 out of 20 said that adults become sick from not eating enough food, and 10 out of 20 said children get sick because of not eating enough. The open-ended nature of this specific question allowed many people to take the time to describe their answers even though I said it wasn't necessary and as a result, a topic that inevitably came up for almost every participant was men's use of alcohol. Many informants described the social problem of men using the money they earn to drink instead of bringing it home to the family and as a result, the family not having enough food to eat. Over half of my sample viewed malnutrition as a problem, and the majority of these people, although not all, attributed it to men spending money on alcohol instead of food. Additionally, 9 out of 20 informants recognized flies as a reason for adults getting sick, 8

out of 20 said being dirty made adults sick, while 15 out of 20 said being dirty made children sick. Furthermore, in terms of bathing I asked all twenty people how many times a week they bathed and averaging their responses, they bathe an average of 6.4 times per week. Some people did not believe it was necessary to bathe everyday but over all bathing everyday is something that is valued. Finally, when asked how to deal with "tristeza", or the word [*i'sanriij*], which translates to depression, the most common answer, which was given by thirteen out of the twenty people surveyed, was that they talk with someone else when they are sad, whether it was a friend, a neighbor, or a pastor.

## Infringements on Utz Ak'asleamar

Over the course of my study in San Marcos, I learned about a few specific situations that directly related to this idea of *utz ak'asleamar*. They illuminate the importance of this idea and life in the local context of San Marcos as well as some of the overlap between biomedicine and the Marqueños' own ideas of health. In all the following cases, each person gave me permission to write about these situations. Additionally, all names have been changed to pseudonyms.

## Marcela

One of my informants I interviewed, Marcela, is directly affected by her husband's use of alcohol. Her husband is rarely at home and spends much of the money he makes on alcohol instead of bringing it home to the family. Marcela has six children and with a lack of money, is not always able to feed them enough. As a child she said she suffered abuse from her parents. She suffers from chronic migraines and when asked how many times in the past year she was sick she reported getting sick about three times a month, or thirty-six times in the past year.

## Laura

Another woman I spoke with, Laura, told me about her one year old son who died only three weeks before our conversation. Laura's family told me that the father of the baby was rarely in the house and was always out drinking and smoking and when he was in the house he was constantly fighting with everyone and causing problems. When the baby became sick, he was not around to help and did not pay any of the medical bills when the baby went to the hospital for a month. When the baby returned from the hospital, the father returned only once to see if the baby was alright and then disappeared for two weeks. Laura's family paid for all the medical bills without help from the father and they blame him and Laura for the death of the baby. Despite his absence, Laura still walks around the town wanting her husband back and does not help out in the household where she lives. Even though she lives in the same house as her siblings and mother, she pays rent there because she does not help out with the family.





## Miguel

Finally, a man named Miguel, who I worked with throughout the summer, and his family encountered a horrible situation early on in the summer. One day I arrived at his house to do a time allocation study with him in the mountains and his wife said that he was at the hospital with his sister, Rosa and that I should return the next day. I arrived again the next day and his wife told me that Miguel was sick, “el está enfermo” (*he is sick*) and was not able to work that day. When I arrived the next day yet again, he had already left for work. It was then that his wife told me that his sister Rosa had been attacked by her husband. Initially, Miguel's wife had said that he was sick, but the next day explained that he was too upset to go to work. Miguel took me to see his sister on another day and her face was swollen with black eyes, she could barely walk from being kicked, and had lacerations from a utility knife. When Miguel spoke about the husband, he said that he was not right in the head, that he had problems, but never spoke a word of getting revenge or doing anything to the husband.

## The Overlap Between 'Utz Ak'asleamar' and 'Salud'

Every one of the above situations is a significant infringement on *utz ak'asleamar* with husbands being absent from the house and not providing for their families to them beating their wives. In the case of Miguel and his sister Rosa being beaten, I find it interesting that Miguel's wife used the word *enfermo* (sick) to describe him as being too sad and depressed to work. I had spent enough time with that family to know that they had sufficient grasp of the Spanish language to use the word *triste* (sad). This however, was not the word his wife used even though had Spanish been her first language, that probably would have been a more appropriate word to use. I believe that because in their own language of Kaqchikel the translation of *salud* encompasses so much more than biological sickness, from my perspective she misrepresented the situation through the use of the word *enfermo*. From my perspective he didn't have a virus that was causing physical symptoms of illness and therefore was not sick. From Miguel's wife's perspective however, his emotional state was one that was at odds with *utz ak'asleamar*, and therefore her choice of words towards me was that word which is at odds with *salud* (health): *enfermo* (sick). I think the overlap between *salud* and *utz ak'asleamar*, in the mind of Miguel's wife did not draw the distinction between sadness due to the situation and an actual biomedical illness. The closest translation to describe the situation for Miguel's wife was *enfermo*, not to indicate a physical sickness, but to describe a problem with his overall wellbeing and sense of tranquility with his family and life, a sickness of *utz ak'asleamar*.

In the other instances of the husbands not being present in the household and household abuse, it can be seen that there are more overlaps between the definitions of *salud* and *utz ak'asleamar*. These situations are a violation of *utz ak'asleamar* but also the direct cause of insufficient food, malnutrition, and one instance sickness that eventually lead to death. If we were to use the word *enfermo* to indicate this violation of *utz ak'asleamar* and

also treat it as such, perhaps steps would be taken to mitigate these situations before sign and symptoms of Western definitions of *enfermo* ever exist. The linguistic differences in ideology here may be more nuanced than my analysis implies, but nevertheless I believe this difference to be important to the health both of the Marqueños and probably also other cultures and societies. Perhaps having a language that pathologizes maladaptive social behavior could illuminate causes and solutions to problems before they become biological sicknesses.

## Notes

1. Kaqchikel written words here are my best attempt at writing their phonetic spelling in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). I am not a professional linguist and have had very basic undergraduate training in anthropological linguistics methods and Mayan linguistics. “Official” orthographies have been developed by professional linguistics but very few Mayan people can use them proficiently.
2. Words in brackets are again my best attempt at writing their phonology in the International Phonetic Alphabet.

## References

- Singer, Merrill, and Hans Baer  
2012 *Introducing Medical Anthropology, A Discipline in Action*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Lanham: AltaMira Press.
- Jansen, Debra A., and Roberta J Emerson  
2013 Homeostasis and Adaptive Responses to Stressors. In *Pathophysiology*. 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Jacquelyn Banasik and Lee-Ellen Copstead eds. Pp. 12-24. St. Louis: Saunders.



# The Applied Anthropologist

Vol. 35

No. 2

2015

## COMMENTARY

A NOTE ON THE APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGIST AS HEALER

HOWARD F. STEIN

### ABSTRACT

In this brief paper the author proposes a model of the applied anthropologist as a "good enough leader" who is also a group healer. The model is based on the work of Donald Winnicott and Wilfred Bion. Although the proposed leadership model of healing and "good medicine" is rarely included in the western biomedical model, it is widespread among non-Western peoples (e.g., American Indians). The author argues that this approach to leadership ideally applies to the style and work of applied anthropologists, who, at their best are group healers who practice "good medicine." Qualities or values of such leadership are openness, inclusiveness, transparency, collaboration, respect, and trust.

**KEY WORDS:** leadership, group healing, good enough leadership, Donald Winnicott, W.R. Bion, Seth Allcorn

I begin with a poem:

#### *Good Enough*

He sits at the large table,  
his hands gently folded in his lap,  
his eyes riveted on the group  
with whom he is consulting,  
listens attentively with every corpuscle  
of his body, now and then asks questions  
or offers a comment, a leader  
who follows his group as well as directs,  
who tries to live up to his motto\* of  
openness, inclusiveness, transparency,  
collaboration, respect, and trust.  
He sees everyone at the table  
as an expert and tells them so,  
always keeps a white, magic marker board  
handy to record everyone's ideas  
so that they can see them for themselves.  
For him, the white board belongs to the group,  
not to him alone. He invites their participation  
in searching for solutions to the problems  
they together had identified.

He admits to the group that he is as fallible  
as anyone else around the table,  
encourages no-fault change  
soothes anxiety by helping everyone  
to feel safe, expects no one  
to be perfect or to have to be right.  
Members of the group begin  
to think out loud with no fear  
of punishment. The answer to the question  
"Who is to be blamed?" is No One,  
no guilt, no defensiveness,

only work on fixing the problem.

He is a good enough leader,  
which turns out to be good enough  
to get the work done,  
and to make everyone feel valued in the process.  
Sometimes a consultant is a good enough healer.

\*Dr. Seth Allcorn, personal communication, 2015

### Introduction

When an applied anthropologist works with a group, what, ideally, is he or she doing? The most immediate answer is that an anthropological practitioner is helping people to solve a problem, to accomplish some task, in a collaborative atmosphere. The applied anthropologist regards and trusts all participants as "expert" in something. So far, I have said nothing new: the *instrumental* role of the applied anthropologist is at once explicit, manifest, and expected. But, for what I hold to be an ideal applied anthropologist, there is an *expressive* dimension as well, one I will speak of as *group-healer*.

When I began attending meetings of the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology in the early 1980's, one of the themes I heard was that "technology transfer" was not only about technology per se, but also about the *relationship* among clients (with their multiple interests, agendas, and identities) and between clients and applied anthropologists. Clients could range from tribes to NGO's to participants in irrigation projects to hospitals and corporations. What would be the ideal type of relationship the anthropological practitioner has with the client group?





## Holding Environment and Container

Both the *holding environment* and *container* have their origins and roots in the caretaker (often mother) – baby relationship, where the adult caretaker literally holds and contains the life-or-death emotions and anxieties of the baby, and responds empathically without being overcome with anxiety, defensiveness, and retaliation. I borrow here from Donald Winnicott (1965) and W.R. Bion (1963). I propose that the relationship between the anthropologist and the client serves simultaneously as an emotional “holding environment” (Winnicott) and as a “container” (Bion) for the anxieties, fears, uncertainties, fantasies, hopes, expectations, and wishes that people bring to projects and those which emerge during the course of the project. Winnicott holds that in order for the baby to thrive with a minimum of annihilation-anxiety, the caretaker must be *good enough*. That is to say, the caretaker or caretakers need not try to be perfect in their attentiveness to the baby’s needs. The baby would quickly sense the anxiety of the caretaker’s impossible pursuit of perfection, and react with anxiety-driven defensiveness.

Fast-forward to adulthood: organizations of all kinds *symbolically* hold, contain, and help (or not help) their members to address the dreads and hopes and wishes of group members. In this context the applied anthropologist acting as group facilitator and gentle leader can serve as a container and holding environment in which the work or task of the group takes place. To put this in a formula: *the expressive culture contains and facilitates the instrumental culture*. Let me illustrate this process with two stories.

### Story #1

A consultant to a large corporation employing thousands of people was interviewing many levels of executives and managers about their own experiences and others’ experiences of massive downsizing that was taking place. He listened attentively and empathically, was fully present to the interviewee, and was genuinely interested in the other person’s story. While he had a list of questions for each person, he did not bombard the interviewee with them or rigidly adhere to the protocol. He facilitated the interviewee to tell his or her story. He also did not react defensively to the obviously disturbing content of the person’s account (such as by changing the subject). Storytelling and story listening were inseparable. The listener’s emotional attitude was part of the atmosphere in which storytelling took place.

One female executive told him of the anxiety, uncertainty, dread, sense of loss and grief, and fear of the future that she and countless others in the corporation were experiencing. No one had ever asked her to tell her story and express the complex, disorganizing feelings that were a part of it and its narration. At work she had tried to protect herself by focusing on her job, trying not to feel, and “staying under the radar.” She was grateful to the interviewer for the opportunity to tell her story. It helped her to put her chaotic experiences and feelings together. At the conclusion of the interview, the consultant asked her how

the interview went for her. She replied with a surprised and puzzled look, “Strange, I came into the interview with a terrible headache. It is now completely gone.” She thanked the consultant for interviewing her. The consultant began to realize that the relationship in which the story was told not only provided organizational (cultural) data, but was also therapeutic to the person who told the story.

### Story #2

For several years a consultant served as group process facilitator for a research and community outreach organization of about twenty people who met monthly for about two hours. The large group consisted of nine constituent project- or task-groups, whose members reported to the director during the meeting on activities of the previous month. During one meeting, a member asked about how we would go about “dumbing down” our methods and findings to members of our constituent communities. As soon as she said that, several people in the large group winced and shifted nervously in their chairs. The group immediately shifted to other topics.

Rather than continue as though nothing of consequence had happened, the facilitator asked the group to pause and go back to that uncomfortable moment and reflect on what had happened. Several people volunteered that they felt uncomfortable, that it had been an awkward moment, and were somewhat upset by her characterization of the process of communicating with community constituents. She apologized for her use of the term. The tense atmosphere of the group lifted, and people became more relaxed. The consultant suggested that it was important to attend to how group members were *feeling*, since this affected the *work* of the group. He then offered the thought that the underlying task-related issue was of the *language* members of the group used to communicate with the community. He also raised the question of how we could imagine our community constituents as culturally (and linguistically) *different* from us rather than *inferior*. Discussion continued for a short while on how to implement this work-related subject.

### Instrumental Is not Enough

At this point the reader may well ask: But why holding and containing? What do these have to do with functioning on a real-world project? What is there to heal in otherwise normal people and groups? All people bring the issues and feelings enumerated above, some of which are unconsciously those based in childhood (transference), to meetings, organizations, and tasks. Most often in Western, especially American, contexts, one is expected to be “on task” and to “leave your personal life and feelings at the door’s entrance.” In an organizational culture dominated by the “techno-rational man” model, people in groups often feel discounted if not abused by top-down hierarchical leadership in which all expertise and power is held to rest in decision-makers at the top of the hierarchy (Allcorn and Stein, 2015).

By contrast, applied anthropologists work with different assumptions about relationships and about how tasks are to be





accomplished. Along with my long-time friend and colleague, Dr. Seth Allcorn, a career health sciences executive, I have come to appreciate that ideal leadership advocates and practices “no-fault change” and “no-fault brainstorming” in an emotionally safe environment where people are not shamed, humiliated, made to feel guilty, and punished. The above two stories illustrate this holding and containing process. Here, participants can creatively play with ideas and thus come up with new thoughts and insights that had not previously been thought. Participants do not fear punishment and are not driven by guilt and defensiveness. They do not feel on guard such that they must be right the first time and follow the leader’s “party line.” They do not live under the dark cloud of the question, “Who is to be blamed?” As Seth Allcorn observes (personal communication, 16 November 2015), “listening to someone talk about their experience is a potentially healing experience.”

A symbolic holding environment that functions as a safe container often feels at first strange, bizarre, unfamiliar, but for many people, it ultimately becomes liberating. Prior wounds of being discounted, berated, emotionally abused, and the inevitable anxiety of working with others in groups, begin to heal in an atmosphere governed by the principles of openness, inclusiveness, transparency, collaboration, respect, and trust.

## Conclusions

I imagine that much if not all of this is familiar to applied anthropologists. What is new, I believe, is the explicit *framework of applied anthropologist-as-healer*, a healer who helps everyone to feel respected and valued in a work group on a project. For group participants, these experiences – and their experience of themselves – can be new and helpful in the face of group conflict and dysfunction. Helping people to feel valued, listened to, heard, and understood is a profound gift of healing, and is something ideal applied anthropologists do every day. We are not perfect. However, we are good enough holding environments and containers. With that, perhaps we practice good enough “medicine” in attending to and healing the soul of the group.

## Notes

1. This paper is based on a presentation at the annual spring meeting of the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology, Denver, CO, 26 April 2015. I wish to thank Seth Allcorn for his valuable editorial suggestions.

## References Cited

Allcorn, Seth and Howard Stein  
*The Dysfunctional Workplace: Stories, Theory, Practice*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, in press.

Bion, W.R.

*Elements of Psycho-analysis*. London: Heinemann, 1963.

Stein, Howard and Seth Allcorn

“Good Enough Leadership: A Model of Leadership,” *Organisational and Social Dynamics* 14(2) 2014: 342-366.

Winnicott, Donald W.

*The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*. London: Hogarth Press, 1965.

