

The International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life at Brandeis University

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Brandeis 1998 Ethics and Coexistence Student Projects Fellows

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Child Survival and Community Health Project in Cuamba, Mozambique
Internship with Medical Care Development International, Washington D.C.

Summary of Paper

As an intern for Medical Care Development International, in Cuamba, Mozambique, I came to appreciate new meanings of the terms "Medical Care" and "Culture." The medical education, as well as supplies (such as vaccines) provided were, on the one hand, as basic as they come, from a Western perspective. On the other hand, these basics were the key to critical issues of life and death. From one perspective, one had to wonder how the utilization of such simple medical care was not the first priority of the communities in which it had been made available. Yet, it takes arduous anthropological investigation and understanding to be able to offer such care to the Macua tribe in Niassa, Mozambique. My paper explores the relationship between indigenous illness beliefs and medical intervention, using my experiences in Mozambique as one in a number of case-studies. The paper also presents a similar task in medical care administration in the United States, among a multi-cultural patient population.

Project Goals:

To reduce infant mortality by targeting major medical problems and constructing a sustainable response to them.



Personal Goals:

To understand trans-cultural medical intervention of the type found in rural, developing regions, including related cultural and political complexities.

To gain clinical experience in the Cuamba hospital.

Activities:

- Observing interviews with traditional healers of the region.
- Accompanying surveyers of local health posts on visits.
- Editing reports and preparing maps of the Niassa region.
- Creating a nutritional questionnaire for gauging the nutritional condition among the local children and mothers.
- Working with doctors and interns to assess the condition of the Cuamba hospital.



Key Dilemmas:

- Is it possible to introduce new solutions from outside of South Africa but apply them in ways that are sensitive to the local cultures and contexts?
- What are the most effective interventions that will result in better housing and the reduction of environmental pollution, both in the present and the future?

Personal Goals

- To learn about the ethnic and political situation in the heterogeneous region of the former Yugoslavia.
- To receive hands-on experience working in an NGO dealing with ethnic conflict and conflict management.



**Activities:**

Observed interactions between people in the community who have passionate feelings about the situation in Yugoslavia.

Visited and interviews representatives of regional and international NGO's involved in human rights work and conflict management in Yugoslavia.

Participated in the Forum for Ethnic Relations's summer school in Zjablak, Montenegro, where I explored issues of Balkan psychology, as well as the crisis in Kosovo and its effects on the Albanian population in Montenegro.

Key Dilemmas:

How can I, as an American, empathize with and understand the powerful emotions associated with nationality and ethnicity in the Balkans?

Is it possible to negotiate, or talk rationally and logically, with people who seem extremely set in their beliefs and convictions? If so, how?

Can historical events and myths be used in forward looking and progressive ways? How?

**Important Learnings**

Being a good listener and observer is important while trying to gain close understanding of another culture's way of thinking.

Different versions of history play an important role in ethnic conflict.

Problems in ethnic relations are not only about racism and prejudices. Ethnic tensions increase when issues of wealth and social status come into play.