

# **Makelawen Medicine? : The Pharmaceutical Commercialization of the Traditional Mapuche Practice**

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December, 2015

## **Abstract**

The Mapuche people make up roughly 9% of the Chilean population and are known for their staunch resistance against colonizing forces and for their fight to maintain cultural integrity. Mapuche medicine is an integral part of this culture and is characterized by its magical-spiritual components and an intimate connection with the natural ecosystem and the plants that it provides. In an attempt for cultural assimilation the Chilean government integrated Mapuche medicinal practices into Chile's national health care plan in the 1990's, opening several Mapuche clinics alongside western hospitals. This was met with such success, both among the indigenous and non-indigenous populations, that the Herbolariás de Chile picked up on this trend and opened the Makelawen Farmacia Mapuche. This pharmacy chain sells concentrated forms of medicinal plants traditionally used in Mapuche medicine. As the popularity of this pharmacy chain has increased the way that the Mapuche people practice medicine has changed, making the Mapuche case an apt case study in the larger debate of the dangers of the increasing pharmaceuticalization of herbal medicine. The aim of this paper is to explore how and why the Mapuche practice of medicine has changed in response to the increased popularity of this medicine brought about by the Makelawen pharmacies. My research shows that the Mapuche practice of medicine has changed across three dimensions which are production, knowledge, and implementation of medicinal herbs and that these changes are not just proof of positive cultural integration, but rather evidence of the dilution and loss of Mapuche medicinal culture.

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### **Introduction: The Pharmaceuticalization of Herbal Medicine**

In the past several decades an interesting trend has presented itself in the realm of health and medicine in many developed nations. What some refer to as a “return to nature” movement of sorts and what some western doctors and scientists see as useless and potentially harmful nonsense, the trend is this: a growing popularity and at times preference for alternative and traditional medicines in countries that have, on the whole, accepted Western medical knowledge and practices. Many scholars discuss this trend with a critical eye, noting the potential degradation and misuse of traditional, alternative, and herbal medicine practices.<sup>1</sup> These scholars argue that integration with western medicine results in losses or abstractions of important cultural and traditional scientific knowledge. In Chile, what began as an attempt at the cultural integration of the indigenous Mapuche group turned into the widespread acceptance, and use, of traditional Mapuche medicine. Its integration into the nationalized health care system has certainly led to many changes in the ways that both indigenous and non-indigenous people perceive and practice medicine in the country, many of which are celebrated. The scope of this paper is to determine whether or not these efforts at integration, though positive in some sense, also result in the misuse or degradation of the practice of traditional medicine, thereby elucidation whether the Mapuche case study serves as further evidence of this phenomenon.

Among the many changes that have occurred in this Chilean community, I am looking specifically at the changes brought about by the introduction of the Makelawen Farmacia Mapuche chain. This pharmacy chain sells medicines that are traditionally used

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<sup>1</sup> Jagtenberg, Tom, “Global Herbal Medicine: A Critique,” *Journal of Alternative and Contemporary Medicine* 9:2 (2003) 321-329.

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in Mapuche medicine to the indigenous and non-indigenous people living in many of Chile's urban centers. There are clear contradictions between the mainstreaming and industrial nature of the Makelawen pharmacy line and the inherently spiritual and situational practice of traditional Mapuche medicine. These contradicting ideologies have created new trends in the way many Chileans view healthcare and access medicine.

Specifically, as it has been practiced throughout history, Mapuche medicine is inherently local, situational, and spiritual. Illnesses are diagnosed and treated on a case-by-case basis with the aid of cosmologically endowed *machis*, or Mapuche healers. This practice is in its very nature antithetical to the global herbalism industry, which has the homogenizing tendency to separate medicinal plants from their sociocultural context in order to sell and administer these drugs to many people, in a shorter time frame.

Many scholars in Chile and the United States have observed that the introduction of Mapuche medicine into Chile's national health care plan has led to a more pluralistic view of health by the entire population. Many have shown that because of these pharmacies both indigenous and non-indigenous are more open and accepting of the type of medicine traditionally practiced by the other group. This has led to a much-needed positive cultural integration in Chile. However, the misuse or degradation of Mapuche medicine is a dimension, which has not yet been explicitly discussed by observing scholars. When the highly specialized and traditional practices of Mapuche medicine are placed into the context of the homogenizing pharmaceutical industry, there is a potential loss of key elements of Mapuche medicinal culture. Thus, I argue that although the introduction of the Makelewen pharmacies has led to positive cultural integration between the indigenous and non-indigenous populations in Chile, it has also led to the

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dilution and overall degradation of the traditional practice of the Mapuche medicine.

This includes in the way that the medicinal plants are produced, the way they are prepared and applied, and the way botanical knowledge is passed from one generation to the next.

In this way, the Mapuche case serves as a prime example of the misuse and degradation of traditional medicine that has resulted from its increased popularity in urban communities in Chile as well as more widely in Western nations. The Makelawen pharmacies are changing the way Mapuche medicine is administered and practiced for the Mapuche people. This is significant because this medicinal knowledge and practice is valuable both culturally and scientifically. The loss of this plant-based knowledge would be a loss for both the Mapuche people and anyone else interested in herbal and alternative medicine.

### **The Mapuche Context**

In the 1990's the Chilean government began making significant efforts to make it's public health system more inclusive to the country's indigenous Mapuche population, particularly in the southern regions of the country, where the largest Mapuche population resides.<sup>2</sup> This consisted of the establishment of Mapuche health clinics in urban settings that provided intercultural health options to urban Mapuche residents who were reluctant to adopt western medical practices.<sup>3</sup> This venture was welcomed and well-received by

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<sup>2</sup> Costanza Torri, Maria. "Medicinal Plants Used in Mapuche Traditional Medicine in Araucanía Chile: Linking Sociocultural and Religious Values with Local Health Practices." *Complementary Health Practice Review* 15:3 (October 2010), 132-148.

<sup>3</sup> Costanza Torri, Maria, "Intercultural Health Practices: Towards an Equal Recognition Between Indigenous Medicine and Biomedicine? A Case Study from Chile" *Health Care Anal* 20:1 (2012), 31-49.

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both the urban Mapuche populations as well as their non-indigenous counterparts who began soliciting these Mapuche health clinics for health care.

In response to this success, the company Herbolaría de Chile opened the first ever Makelawen Farmacia Mapuche in 2003, which offered Mapuche remedies to common health and cosmetic needs. The customer base for these pharmacies was and is 90% non indigenous and they have plans of expanding internationally in coming years.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, notable changes have occurred among the Mapuche people in regards to their knowledge and practice of health care. In “Traditional Medicine and Biomedicine among Mapuche Communities in Temuco, Chile: New Forms of Medical Pluralism in Health Care Delivery,” Maria Costanza Torri and Julie Laplante discuss the adoption of a pluralistic view of health observed in the population of younger generation Mapuche people in Temuco, Chile. They observe that the commercialization and mainstreaming of Mapuche medicine into the public health infrastructure has led to the adoption of western health care strategies by the Mapuche people and the adoption of Mapuche medical strategies by the non-indigenous population creating a medically pluralist society.<sup>5</sup> Although this has led to significant and positive cultural integration, and surely important health improvements in many ways, particularly in urban settings, it has also led to the dilution of the practice of Mapuche medicine. This includes the loss of

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<sup>4</sup> Coon, Elliott. “Mapuche Pharmaceutical Line Goes International.” *The Santiago Times*. Dec. 13, 2006. Web. Accessed on Oct. 13, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Costanza Torri, Maria and Laplante, Julie. “Traditional Medicine and Biomedicine among Mapuche Communities in Temuco, Chile: New Forms of Medical Pluralism in Health Care Delivery,” *Anthropologica* 55:2 (2013): 413-423.

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medicinal ritualistic traditions as well as the diminishment of medicinal plant knowledge among younger generation of *machis*, or Mapuche healers.<sup>6</sup>

The Makelawen pharmacies are staffed by Mapuche people who are knowledgeable about the products they are selling and their herbal origins.<sup>7</sup> However, these pharmacies sell only 48 Mapuche products, many of which fall into a cosmetic category.<sup>8</sup> Since these pharmacies are catering to a primarily non-indigenous population as well as a clientele base that uses Mapuche medicine in a supplemental manner for the most part, some Mapuche plant remedies are gaining more attention than other remedies which hold more cultural importance to the Mapuche people. Moreover, the mass commercialization of these formulas is leading to the increased agricultural growth and production of only these plants, leading to a loss of importance placed on the diversity of Mapuche medicine and the spiritual and ritualistic components that are integral to the use of these ingredients in Mapuche medicine.

### **Research Methods**

In order to investigate how the Makelawen pharmacies have affected the practice of Mapuche medicine among the Mapuche people across the three dimensions I mentioned earlier, I will take a three-pronged approach of comparative analysis.

First, I will compare the Makelawen advertisements for specific plant based medicines with records from the Chilean Ministry of Agriculture, looking at programs that were centered on the increased growth of medicinal herbs. Specifically, I looked at

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<sup>6</sup> Costanza Torri, Maria. "Medicinal Plants Used in Mapuche Traditional Medicine in Araucanía Chile: Linking Sociocultural and Religious Values with Local Health Practices." *Complementary Health Practice Review* 15:3 (October 2010), 132-148.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Coon, Elliott. "Mapuche Pharmaceutical Line Goes International." *The Santiago Times*. Dec. 13, 2006. Web. Accessed on Oct. 13, 2015

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programs that were connected in some way to reclamation of Mapuche lands for the purpose of medicinal plant growth, or employment of Mapuche people in the cultivation of these plants. In this way, I was able to analyze if and how the plant-based medicines popularized by the Makelawen have affected Mapuche production of these plants.

Next I again compared the Makelawen advertisements for medicinal herbs with a study done and discussed by Costanza Torri in “Medicinal Plants Used in Mapuche Traditional Medicine in Araucanía Chile: Linking Sociocultural and Religious Values with Local Health Practices” which analyzed the amount and type of medicinal herbs known and used by younger *machis* compared with older *machis*.<sup>9</sup> In this way I was able to deduce if the popularization of specific plant-based medicines was leading to decreased knowledge of other traditionally used plants.

Lastly, I will compare the way in which the Makelawen pharmacies process their herbal remedies in contrast to that seen in primary source literature on the traditional processing of plant-based medicines by the Mapuche people. The facts regarding how the Makelawen process their plants -- that is, whether it is prepared as a tincture, pill, tea, or other form -- was found on their website’s list of products. The information found regarding traditional Mapuche processing of plants came from the book *Mujeres Mapuches: el saber tradicional en la curación de enfermedades comunes* in which Sonia Montecino and Ana Conejeros compiled a collection of commonly used herbs and described how they are prepared and administered in a recipe book of sorts.

### **Findings and Significance: Are traditional practices being diluted?**

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<sup>9</sup> Costanza Torri, Maria. "Medicinal Plants Used in Mapuche Traditional Medicine in Araucanía Chile: Linking Sociocultural and Religious Values with Local Health Practices." *Complementary Health Practice Review* 15:3 (October 2010), 132-148.

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### **Production of Medicinal Plants: Traditional vs. Pharmaceutical**

The production and harvesting of medicinal plants plays an integral role in the power that a plant is endowed with from the perspective of the Mapuche people. Since the Makelawen pharmacy chain is catering to a much larger and diverse population base, they cannot necessarily place as much time and importance on the process of harvesting and growing medicinal plants as the Mapuche people traditionally do. Due to this fact, the production trends of many of these plants have shifted in recent years.

In the practice of Mapuche medicine, the spiritual healers are known as *machis*. Their role in the community is similar to that of a shaman and they are typically women. Every machi is endowed with power over specific plants, which will be revealed to them in a dream or vision of sorts. These plants are not grown intentionally but rather already exist in the natural Chilean ecosystem. Most Mapuche people generally already know these plants. Once the *machi* is endowed with the power to use these plants, she may harvest them and use them in their medicinal practices. If these plants are incorrectly harvested, or harvested by someone who is not endowed with the power to use them, the *machi* believe that the medicines will be ineffective or may even cause more harm to the ill person.<sup>10</sup>

Within a spiritual context, it is incredibly important to note the power of intention associated with the harvesting of plants and making of medicines. The practice of Mapuche medicine is a spiritual practice with the aim of healing spiritual maladies that have manifested in the form of physical illness. It is about resolving disharmony that exists in a person's life that is causing them to be ill. It makes sense then, that the

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<sup>10</sup>Citrella, Luca, *Medicina y Culturas en La Arucania*,(Santiago: Trafkin, 1995), 264-285.



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medicinal plants used are believed to grow in harmony with nature and hold some spiritual powers associated with the creation of harmonious human relations. That is, the assumption is that plants are native to the land and will grow without the intention of being used for medicinal purposes. They are endowed with powers of nature beyond those of the human, thus they are capable of bringing about the same sort of harmony that they are endowed with to the humans who ingest them. While this may not seem significant from a Western point of view, it is incredibly important from a Mapuche point of view. The intention with which a plant is grown is an integral factor determining a plants spiritual power to heal. The manner in which these plants are harvested and “produced” are both incredibly important components of the culture surrounding Mapuche medicine and are imbued with intense spiritual importance.

Furthermore, medicinal plants used by the Mapuche people are separated into different categories based on their properties and the type of illness they help cure. These categories are *lawen* (medicinal plant) of the water, *lawen* of the air, *lawen* of the earth, and female and male *lawen*.<sup>11</sup> These classifications are extremely important in the determination of the correct remedy for an illness.

As the Makelawen pharmacies have grown in popularity and numbers, there has been an increasing demand for the plant-based Mapuche medicines popularized by this pharmacy chain. In order to get all of the plants used to make these traditional remedies in the correct quantities, plants are often imported from outside of Chile, or are harvested

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<sup>11</sup> <sup>11</sup> Costanza Torri, Maria. "Medicinal Plants Used in Mapuche Traditional Medicine in Araucanía Chile: Linking Sociocultural and Religious Values with Local Health Practices." *Complementary Health Practice Review* 15:3 (October 2010), 132-148.

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by non-*machi* employees of the Makelawen pharmacies.<sup>12</sup> Although the Makelawen pharmacy does take an approach to plant production and harvesting that is strongly founded in the importance of harmony with nature in terms of being sustainable and organic,<sup>13</sup> there is little emphasis placed on the spiritual importance of the harvesting process that is so highly emphasized in traditional Mapuche medicine. Contradictory to Mapuche medicinal beliefs, the medical plants used by the Makelawen pharmacies are grown –that is, cultivated – not with intentions that come from the plant’s role in nature but rather with the intention of being used for medicinal purposes.

Added to this, efforts have been made by the Chilean Ministry of Agriculture to increase Mapuche production of medicinal plants. In July 2014, the Ministry of Agriculture signed a cooperation agreement between the Institute of Agriculture Development and the National Forestry Cooperation that aimed to develop the services portfolio of agriculture to support the most vulnerable rural stakeholders, in this case, the Mapuche people. This initiative consisted of the delivery of native trees to the Mapuche people in the Temuco region that were to be used for medicinal purposes.<sup>14</sup> Among these native trees was *boldo*, which contains one of the active agents in one of the Makelawen’s best-selling items, *el palwén*, otherwise known as Mapuche Viagra.

Although these plants were for Mapuche medicinal use, the increased production of these

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<sup>12</sup> Raussel, Fuencis, “Chile’s Indian pharmacies offer cancer cures, aphrodisiacs,” *Mobility Techzone*, June 10, 2008, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.mobilitytechzone.com/news/2008/06/10/3491204.htm>

<sup>13</sup> “Chile: Farmacia mapuche, una alternativa de vida sana,” *El Polvorín*, May 15, 2010, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://elpolvorin.over-blog.es/article-chile-farmacia-mapuche-una-alternativa-de-vida-sana-50483690.html>

<sup>14</sup> “Ministro Furche entrega árboles nativos a comunidades mapuches para usarlos con fines medicinales,” *Ministerio de Agricultura*, July 25, 2014, accessed on November 5, 2015, <http://www.minagri.gob.cl/ministro-furche-entrega-arboles-nativos-a-comunidades-mapuches-para-usarlos-con-fines-medicinales/>

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medicinal herbs opened up access to these plants in the entire market, which is beneficial for non-Mapuche corporations, such as the Makelawen, who use the same medicinal plants.

Although the production and harvesting practices performed by the Makelawen pharmacies are not intentionally intervening in traditional Mapuche production and harvesting practices, the popularization of Mapuche medicines that have resulted due to the introduction of this pharmacy chain has unintentionally altered the way plants used in Mapuche medicinal plants are produced. Although in rural settings production may not have changed much, for the Mapuche people living in urban settings, primary access to Mapuche medicine comes from the Mapuche clinics that work within conventional health care centers and from the Makelawen pharmacies. In these settings, the plants are not usually harvested by *machis* who have the cosmological right to harvest these powerful medicines and thus these plants are taken out of their spiritual-cultural context. Furthermore, the pressure of the placed on the Mapuche people to grow more medicinal plants by the Chilean Ministry of Agriculture and the Mapuche people's subsequent acceptance of this initiative provides an example of the Mapuche people's willingness to consider the integration of government and corporate interests into the highly cosmologically regulated realm of medicinal plant production.

### **Preparation and Application of Medicinal Plants**

Since the Makelawen pharmacies are creating products that customers can buy online or in the store with limited consultation by medicinal practitioners, the types of products available have been minimized and mainstreamed down to a few main forms of preparation. In traditional Mapuche medicine, the way that the plant is prepared for

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medicinal use is dependent upon many contextual factors including the classification of the plant and the type of ailment it is being used for. By comparing traditional preparation methods of the Mapuche people with the preparation methods used by the Makelawen pharmacy chain, I hope to reveal how these preparations have been homogenized by the Makelawen pharmacies in a way that removes an integral component of the practice of Mapuche medicine.

The Mapuche people classify illnesses into four general forms. The first classification is illnesses produced by the passage of heat to cold, which is usually associated with air. The second is illnesses produced by exposure to the cold for too long, which is associated more with water. The third classification of illness is illnesses of “*huincas*” or foreigners. These illnesses are associated with non-Mapuche people and usually western medicine practitioners are consulted for the treatment of these illnesses. The last category of illness is illness due to wounds. This consists of both internal and external wounds and irritations.<sup>15</sup> The type of illness that a person has, and the constitutions of the person themselves, will determine what type of treatment they will receive. This includes not only the type of plants used, but also how these plants are prepared.

In terms of plant preparation, the Mapuche people have many complex and specific methods of preparations for every plant depending upon the type of illness being cured. For example, after a woman gives birth, the herb *canelo* will be massaged on her body. This same herb will be ingested as a poultice for fevers. In total, there are roughly nine general methods for preparation noted by the Mapuche people. However, these

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<sup>15</sup> Ana Conejeros and Sonia Montecino, “Mujeres Mapuches: el saber tradicional en la curación de enfermedades comunes” *Serie Mujer y Salud* 2 (1985): n.p.

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methods of preparation are altered slightly for each plant and each illness they are meant to heal based off the different properties and characteristics of the plants and the specific features of the illness.<sup>16</sup>

The medicines sold by the Makelawen pharmacies come in four main forms: supplemental capsules, concentrated oils, teas, and gels/creams.<sup>17</sup> The Makelawen pharmacy chain employs pharmaceutical chemists of both Mapuche and non-Mapuche origin, who isolate the active agents in the medicinal plants traditionally used in Mapuche medicine, and turn these agents into one of the four forms mentioned above.<sup>18</sup> As with traditional Mapuche medicine, some plants can be used in several different forms, but differing from traditional Mapuche medicine all of the forms are prepared in the same way. That is, all of the oils, capsules, teas, and gels are prepared using a formula for oils, capsules, teas, or gels, with only slight variations depending on the plant being used.

The preparation and implementation of medicinal plants performed by the Makelawen pharmacies is thus fundamentally different from the preparation and implementation performed by machis and other practitioners of traditional Mapuche medicine. While traditional Mapuche medicine views the preparation of the plant as a component which affects the medicinal properties of the plant, Makelawen pharmacists

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<sup>16</sup> Ana Conejeros and Sonia Montecino, "Mujeres Mapuches: el saber tradicional en la curación de enfermedades comunes" *Serie Mujer y Salud 2* (1985): n.p.

<sup>17</sup>"Farmacia Mapuche makelawen," last modified in 2013, accessed on November 4, 2015, <https://www.comprafarmaciamapuche.cl/index.php/>

<sup>18</sup> "Chile: Farmacia mapuche, una alternativa de vida sana," *El Polvorín*, May 15, 2010, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://elpolvorin.over-blog.es/article-chile-farmacia-mapuche-una-alternativa-de-vida-sana-50483690.html>

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view the active agent of the plant as the only relevant component and work to concentrate this active agent into its most potent and effective form.<sup>19</sup>

This is troublesome because for many Mapuche people living in urban settings, the Makelawen is one of the main places they can access their traditional medicines. In another study done by sociologist Maria Costanza Torri, she reports that over 50% of the interviewed Mapuche people living in Temuco, Chile have adopted a more pluralistic view of health. This was based on interviews regarding how these Mapuche people view Western and Mapuche medicine and their levels of effectiveness.<sup>20</sup> These Mapuche people are thus becoming more familiar and accustomed to these mainstream forms of medicines traditionally used in their culture. This suggests an overall dilution of the practice of Mapuche medicine in terms of the diagnostic, preparation and therapeutic techniques for delivering treatments.

It is not an inherently negative trend for Mapuche people to be adopting a more pluralistic or even a more commercialized and modern approach to healthcare. In fact, it may be a positive trend when viewed from a public health perspective. However when viewed from a preservation outlook, this trend is troublesome. It is important to note that by adopting this pluralistic view of health, these Mapuche people have to compromise some of their traditional medicine practices. The Makelawen pharmacies provide convenient alternatives to medicines traditionally used in Mapuche culture. As more and more Mapuche people opt to use this convenient option, the emphasis and importance

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<sup>19</sup> Gonzales, Carla C, "Machis con delantal blanco," *Punto Vital*, February, 2008, accessed on November 4, 2015, <http://www.puntovital.cl/salud/medicinamapuuche.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Costanza Torri, Maria and Laplante, Julie. "Traditional Medicine and Biomedicine among Mapuche Communities in Temuco, Chile: New Forms of Medical Pluralism in Health Care Delivery," *Anthropologica* 55:2 (2013): 413-423.

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placed on the diversity of preparation and the specificity of therapeutic techniques is lost. As this emphasis is lost, the practice of traditional Mapuche medicine is degraded.

### **Access to Botanical Knowledge**

The success of the Makelawen pharmacy chain has also corresponded with an interesting trend in the amount of traditional plant-based knowledge held by the Mapuche people. It would appear that as the popularity of the Makelawen pharmacy chain has increased, plant-based medicinal knowledge held by machis of the younger generation has decreased. There are a few possible explanations for this trend.

Traditionally, knowledge of medicinal plants is passed to younger generations in two ways. The first is through oral transmission, and the second is through magical-religious methods in which knowledge of plants and the remedies to use them in is presented to machis in their dreams or in visions.<sup>21</sup> Many Mapuche people have knowledge of plant-based medicines that they will often use to make “home remedies” for which the spiritual power of a machi is not necessary. For any illness that has a magical-religious component, the remedy will need to be prepared by a machi, and knowledge for how to cure this ailment, including the plants to use, will be presented to the *machi* in a dream or vision. Among both *machis* and non-*machi* Mapuche people, knowledge of plant medicines is generally passed from older generation women to younger generation women during the early teens.<sup>22</sup> For a *machi*, the training process begins after she experiences her first vision, called a *pewman* by the Mapuche people. If this young woman does not heed the calling to become a healer by seeking the training

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<sup>21</sup>Citrella, Luca, *Medicina y Culturas en La Arucania*,(Santiago: Trafkin, 1995), 264-285.

<sup>22</sup> Costanza Torri, Maria. "Medicinal Plants Used in Mapuche Traditional Medicine in Araucanía Chile: Linking Sociocultural and Religious Values with Local Health Practices." *Complementary Health Practice Review* 15:3 (October 2010), 132-148.

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from an older *machi*, she could remain sick for her whole life. The training period generally lasts between two to four years and consists of observation of the older *machi*'s practice and teaching by way of oral transmission from the older *machi* to the younger *machi*.<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting then, that in a study performed by sociologist, Maria Costanza Torri, younger *machis* reported knowing significantly fewer plants with medicinal properties than *machis* of the older generations. Older *machi* indicated knowing an average of 150 plants, whereas younger *machi* reported knowing an average of only 80 to 90 plants.<sup>24</sup>

There are a few possible reasons for this loss of knowledge. One explanation is that changes in the local ecosystem have caused some plants traditionally used in Mapuche medicine to disappear from the landscape. Another explanation is the rural to urban migration among younger Mapuche people that impedes the oral transmission of knowledge and makes it harder to retain all of the important aspects of Mapuche medicinal culture. Another cause for this loss of knowledge is the increased specialization of botanical knowledge of the younger *machi* due to the increased popularity of specific plants, brought about by the introduction of the Makelawen pharmacy chain.

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<sup>23</sup> Citrella, Luca, *Medicina y Culturas en La Arucania*, (Santiago: Trafkin, 1995), 264-285.

<sup>24</sup> Costanza Torri, Maria. "Medicinal Plants Used in Mapuche Traditional Medicine in Araucanía Chile: Linking Sociocultural and Religious Values with Local Health Practices." *Complementary Health Practice Review* 15:3 (October 2010), 132-148.



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There are roughly 50 naturally derived remedies sold by the Makelawen pharmacies currently.<sup>25</sup> For some of these remedies multiple plants are used, and for other remedies the same plant is used in different forms. In any case, the number of plants used by the Makelawen pharmacies to make their remedies is far fewer than the number of plants that are used traditionally by the Mapuche people. The increased popularity and demand for specific plant-based medicines has resulted in an increase in specialized knowledge of these particular plants.

Furthermore, the increased popularity of specific plants has affected what kind of knowledge is retained about them. This can be seen in the case of the boldo plant. This plant is used traditionally by the Mapuche people to treat gall and coughs.<sup>26</sup> It is also an ingredient in a medicine that increases sexual libido in both men and women.<sup>27</sup> The Makelawen pharmacies picked up this remedy and it quickly became one of their best-selling items. As such, the identity of the boldo plant has changed. It is now known primarily for its ability to increase sexual libido, and far less often for its more common traditional Mapuche uses.

This is particularly true for the young machis who are experiencing pressure to work with and for the Makelawen pharmacies as traditional healer “pharmacists” of sorts. The Makelawen pharmacies have a marketing strategy that is not directed at Mapuche people, but rather at the non-indigenous Chilean population who make up roughly 90% of

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<sup>25</sup> Coon, Elliot, “Mapuche Pharmaceutical Line Goes International,” *The Santiago Times*, December 13, 2006, accessed on November 4, 2015, <http://santiagotimes.cl/mapuche-pharmaceutical-line-goes-international/>

<sup>26</sup> Costanza Torri, Maria. "Medicinal Plants Used in Mapuche Traditional Medicine in Araucanía Chile: Linking Sociocultural and Religious Values with Local Health Practices." *Complementary Health Practice Review* 15:3 (October 2010), 132-148.

<sup>27</sup> “El palwén, el viagra mapuche unisex,” *Alimentación Sana*, accessed on November 4, 2015, <http://www.alimentacion-sana.org/PortalNuevo/actualizaciones/palwenviagra.htm>

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the clientele base.<sup>28</sup> The plant-based remedies they emphasize are catered to this audience. Since most of this population uses Mapuche medicine in a supplemental manner, many of the plant-based remedies emphasized are purely cosmetic or for the superficial treatment of illness. They are created and marketed for the general client, to be employed by the clients themselves essentially removing the role of the machi entirely. It would be one thing if the machis were not involved to begin with, but since they are being integrated into the Makelawen corporate structure, and since this has correlated with a decrease in the botanical knowledge held by machis, it would appear that the introduction of this pharmacy chain has in fact negatively affected the knowledge that machis are maintaining in their medicinal cultural consciousness.

### **Conclusion**

The Makelawen pharmacies have created convenient alternatives to traditional medicines for the Mapuche people living in urban settings as well as opened up this type of medicine to Chile's non-indigenous population. The popularity of this type of medicine, made possible by the Makelawen pharmacies, has led to deeper cultural understanding and integration between the Mapuche and non-Mapuche people living in Chile, particularly in urban settings. However, this increased popularity and access to traditional Mapuche medicines has also resulted in the dilution and degradation of this type of traditional medicine. Cultural traditions change over time no matter what, and the cultural integration of Mapuche and non-Mapuche people in the realm of medicine is inevitable to some degree. Furthermore, the integration of health care practices has

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<sup>28</sup> Coon, Elliot, "Mapuche Pharmaceutical Line Goes International," *The Santiago Times*, December 13, 2006, accessed on November 4, 2015, <http://santiagotimes.cl/mapuche-pharmaceutical-line-goes-international>

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opened up health care options for all Chileans leading to an overall higher degree of health and well being in the country. That being said, there is an argument to be made for the preservation of the practice of Mapuche medicine, and direct links exist between the introduction of the Makelawen pharmacy chain and the dilution of traditional Mapuche medicine in the past decade.

In the realm of production it can be seen that the increased demand for plant-based medicines caused by the introduction of the Makelawen pharmacy chain has led to changes in the way that Mapuche people produce and access these plants both in urban and rural settings. Rather than plants being harvested from their natural ecosystem by *machis* or other medicine practitioners endowed with a cosmological right to use these plants, Mapuche people are using plants produced with the intentional purpose of being used for medicine. In urban settings, plants are either imported from outside of the country or harvested by people with no connection to the client or even Mapuche culture in some cases. In rural settings Mapuche people are being pressured to grow more medicinal plants, once again with the intentional purpose of being used for medicine. Although these changes in production methods seem small, their implications are quite large. Since the Mapuche view the way a plant is produced, including the intention behind its existence, and its harvesting as important factors which affect the power of the plant, producing plants with the sole purpose of the plant being used for medicine greatly undermines a spiritual ideology which is foundational in the practice of Mapuche medicine.

In the realm of implementation it can be seen that the Makelawen pharmacy chains' mainstreamed methods for preparing plant-based medicines, which concentrate

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the active agents of these plants into their most potent form, have provided a convenient medicine alternative for Mapuche people which ignores the diversity of traditional Mapuche plant-medicine preparation and largely ignores the spiritual component of this process. The preparation of these plants into their medicinal forms done by Mapuche people, particularly *machis*, is both a spiritual process and a process that is tailored to each specific plant and each specific illness. In this sense it is highly contextualized and situational, which is a foundational tenet of Mapuche medicine. As more Mapuche people opt to use the medicines prepared by the Makelawen pharmacies, traditional preparation methods are devalued and the spiritual and situational components of this process are forgotten, since they are no longer integral or necessary to obtaining Mapuche medicine.

Finally, the popularization of specific plant-based remedies has led to a decrease in specialized knowledge of plant-medicines among the Mapuche people and specifically the machi. It has also, at times, led to changes in what plants are known for. This can be seen in the case of the boldo plant. The increased popularity of specific-plant medicines is thus changing the identity of these plants for Mapuche people, particularly those living in urban settings. This knowledge is incredibly important to the practice of Mapuche medicine, both culturally and medicinally. Since most of the botanical knowledge is transmitted orally, there is no way to know how much knowledge has already been lost, and there is no current method to preserve the knowledge that still exists.

The Makelawen pharmacy chain has changed the face of Mapuche medicine. This chain actively foregoes many important spiritual and cultural traditions in the production, preparation, and knowledge of their plant-medicines and although they do not claim to be entirely authentic in this regard, they do claim the name Mapuche and advertise

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themselves as a Mapuche alternative to health care. Furthermore, their medicines are increasingly used by Mapuche people. Although they may be using the same plants Mapuche people use in their plant-medicines, their methods ignore fundamental aspects of the practice of Mapuche medicine. The pharmacies' effects on the markets of these plants, the consciousness of these plants, and the use of these plants have all diluted the traditional practice of Mapuche medicine in some way or another.

The Mapuche case is a prime example of misuse and degradation of traditional medicine practices brought about by its increased popularity in modernized, urban communities and Westernized nations. It is significant because this medicinal practice is important both culturally and scientifically. In both realms, knowledge is being lost or altered. As stated earlier, this phenomenon is by no means specific to Chile and the Mapuche case alone. All over the globe, people who are fully educated in the benefits and reaches of Western medicine are opting to use alternative, traditional, or herbal medicine in at least a supplemental manner. Often when this occurs, the medicine is not employed entirely accurately or true to its original form. As more and more people opt for this type of medicine, without full knowledge of its purpose or application, the face of these types of medicines is changing. Although progress and integration in this realm is positive, it is important to retain our scientific and cultural knowledge of these practices.

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